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51st Year of Publication

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TED  
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## EDITORIAL



**STILL ALIVE AFTER 50 YEARS:** To paraphrase a famous quotation, the rumors of this magazine's demise have been somewhat exaggerated. For the past year or more I've heard these rumors—or rumors of rumors. At one point a famous fanzine editor wrote to ask me if it was true—as he'd heard it bruted about on the West Coast—that I'd left this magazine and it had returned to an all-reprint policy. (If it was true, he wanted the exclusive story.) At conventions I attended during the spring of 1976 I was asked repeatedly if it was true that *AMAZING* would fold after its 50th Anniversary issue.

Obviously those rumors—like all the previous rumors of impending sales to other publishers—were not true. We are here and we shall continue to be here, still doing business at the same stand as usual.

However, many of those rumors were based on what I might call "speculative fact." That is, at different times prospective purchasers of this magazine did enter into negotiations with our publisher. One of them, for instance, was Roger Elwood, who wished to rename this magazine *Roger Elwood's Amazing Stories*, a conceit which none of the four publishers of this magazine ever descended to, fortunately.

And, more than a year ago I published a column in *Science Fiction Review* in the course of which I stated that I had resigned my editorship, but agreed to remain with the magazine through its 50th Anniversary issue.

This was true (although one minor New York author disputed it in the strongest terms at the time, in a piece so libelous that it was never published), and no doubt gave rise to subsequent rumors, such as the one about my leaving and the magazine returning to reprints.

The Lunacon in New York City this year, as I mentioned in the March issue, honored *AMAZING*'s 50th birthday and as part of the festivities I appeared on a panel with Joe Ross and Barry Malzberg (past editors of this magazine under its current publisher). At that time I told the audience some of the problems with which I have had to deal, as editor of *AMAZING*, and I described my intention—which persisted into last winter—to resign my editorship following the 50th Anniversary issue. At that point Barry, seated on my right, hastily scribbled a note, which read *Don't do it!* I appreciated that—as well as the many very kind things Barry, Joe and others said about me that afternoon—but had to tell Barry not to worry. I had, I explained, changed my mind.

Frankly, I have had to wrestle with myself over this, and I did not make up my mind until I had considered the pros and cons for a period of several months. On the one hand, editing this magazine (and its sister magazine, *FANTASTIC*) is very much like a subsidized hobby. The salary is too low to live upon, which demands that I treat my work on the magazine as a part-time job, supplementing my income elsewhere. Yet, the work the

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# THE DREAM LIONS

JACK DANN

*In last issue's "Starhiker" Jack Dann introduced to us Bo Forester, a man who lived on a placid Earth of tomorrow—an Earth ruled by the alien Hrau, whose incomprehensible devices and architecturally unreal structures punctuate the open pastoral landscape. Forester found a way to pass through the Hrau's telepathic barrier and board a starship. Aboard the ship he found himself forced to kill one of the Hrau to avoid discovery, and then escaped via a scoutcraft to another world upon which humankind also lived under the benevolent care of the Hrau. There he met Kezia and her strange "pet," an insect-animal, and followed her into a skycity, from which both were rejected. If "Starhiker" was relatively straightforward in its exposition, its sequel, "The Dream Lions," partakes of dreams glimpsed through mirrors. Dann says, "Many authors influenced the story I have told. Among them are Adrian Berry (The Next Ten Thousand Years); Jorge Luis Borges ("A New Refutation of Time"); Arthur C. Clarke (Profiles of the Future); Dr. Robert L. Forward (Far Out Physics); R. Buckminster Fuller (The Dymaxion World of Buckminster Fuller); I. M. Levitt (Beyond the Known Universe); Olaf Stapledon (The Star Maker); D. T. Suzuki (Zen Buddhism); Mortimer Taube (Computers and Common Sense); and John G. Taylor (Black Holes). Portions of the latter chapters are adaptations of concepts developed by mathematicians Banach and Tarski and concepts developed by the mathematician Georg Cantor; other portions are adapted from a paper by Bryce DeWitt ("Quantum Mechanics and Reality"). The use to which I have put these ideas are my own, however, as are any distortions . . ."*

THE INSECT-ANIMAL was waiting for them in the scrub beside the cliff road. Everything had turned to rust in the cold, pelting rain. Bo was hiding—he didn't turn his head to scan the road, but concentrated on himself and his immediate surroundings. The rain made ghost walls and ceilings. It isolated him from Kezia. He had followed her through the crowds below the *Fragrant Cloud*, a

skycity which floated about four hundred feet above the west edge of Nineveh-town. He had wished only to be another figure, another wet head in the crowd. Now he could relax and leave the noise and business of commerce and custom behind.

He stood quietly in his roughly outlined room of rain.

"Well, I guess it just wasn't to be," Kezia said as she picked up her pet.

**Illustrated by Steve Fabian**



Its wet fur was matted and had an oily shine. Bo felt a chill as he remembered cleaning eels and flatfish with a sharp stone on a desolate shore. He coughed and hoped the rain would not leave him with a cold.

"We should have left *The Cloud* as soon as I realized the animal was missing," she said, holding her pet tightly against her chest.

Bo sensed her enforced loneliness, her defeat, and her aimlessness—although she had scuffed around like a scatgirl, she had always been on her way to find a family. She had probably rationalized away years, Bo thought. Always pretending to be looking for her skypeople, she had become purposely waylaid and lost. Her dreams and fantasies were bright pennies strewn along tortuous paths. But every day would wear her down, bring another loss, until she finally had to grip her destiny—just as I had to take mine, Bo thought. So now she was nowhere, submerged in a seemingly endless red night with a loner, a Faubougher who followed no direction but chance. Without a family, she had no choice but to follow her eyeless destiny. Like all boes, Bo thought.

He grew restless as he waited for her. Her past was walled off by scrimps of red rain.

"Are you ready?" Bo asked, touching her hand. But the red rain segregated them, created more rooms of mist and chill. There could be no warmth or touching here.

She nodded; and as they left the rocky outskirts of Nineveh, Bo remembered the *Fragrant Cloud* as a mock sun hanging over the stone city of grounded skypeople. His feet squelched in the ruddle mud and slipped on the stones. He felt as if the very air was made out of ghosts and

imagined that Hrau, the grey-faced aliens, were hiding somewhere in the mist. They would search him out and punish him for leaving Earth, he thought. But this world—with its ghosts and folk and Hrau—seemed to be only a simulacrum of Earth. And he was still a boe, still moving from town to town, moving from Hrau . . .

"This is the long way around Nineveh," Kezia said, "but we're least likely to meet with folk or Hrau hereabouts." She dropped the insect-animal, and it ran ahead. "From here we can take the cliff path into High Gorge. You can see the gorge from here. It's north-west of Nineveh." She pointed into the haze, but Bo's imagination provided its own phantasmagoric geography. Rain and mountains merged into fists and faces. Castles floated beside giant birds. All the heads of nightmare seemed to be turned toward Bo.

"How far is the Hrauport?" Bo asked shivering in the cold.

"A half-day after we reach the tubes."

"How far are the tubes?" Bo asked.

"Through the gorge," she said, ending the conversation, putting a non-verbal distance between them as they walked together. They followed a well-used road that ribboned around mountains that looked like castle battlements. When the road reached lowground, it became a mudpath which resembled a brown river with tributaries leading to towns and settlements. Although Bo had no wish to follow the smaller paths, he sensed that he would be comfortable and familiar with the surrounding towns, folk, fields, farms, and communes. This world had the same skin as Earth. But that was a ruse, Bo thought. A fluke. This world was as familiar and as alien as the landscape

of embers burning and crumbling inside a furnace. He thought about Kezia—she was the dark voice of this place. In some ways she was as alien to Bo as Hrau; yet she was like him. When he was on the edge of sleep and thinking about her, it seemed as if they were lost parts of each other.

—Or, perhaps, Bo thought, it was her differentness that attracted him.

When the rain stopped and the mist cleared, the red torpid sun was in the center of the streaked sky. It was as if the walls had been lifted. Bo felt that distance had been telescoped and he could touch the far edges of the world. To the north, twin mountain peaks were etched against the sky. Before him was High Gorge. It was a microcosm of the surrounding geography, a canyon containing mesa and bluff and grassy hummock, and the palisades looked like a relief of dwarf mountains.

The road followed the natural contours of the rocky terrain, sometimes turning into a narrow shelf on the side of the canyon, then turning back into the safety of rock and brush. As Bo followed Kezia along the ledge, he saw that there were openings and steps cut into the palisade walls; and he caught sight of a ladder being hoisted into one of the dark entranceways.

To live in these rocks would be like living in the sky, Bo thought, scanning the sheer cliffs and jagged shelves blemished with scrub. He wondered how the gorge would look under the yellow sun, and thought of white and yellow cliffs standing against a slate sky. Then light and shadow would be familiar, and home would be closer, he thought.

"They live in the cliffs," Kezia said. "It's a religious community. Most *tfiligen* never leave the cliffs. When

they die, they're thrown into the gorge. It's God's land."

"That sounds like Catechism," Bo said. "What's *tfiligen*?"

Kezia smiled and said, "It means 'those-who-pray.' Custom has it that when God visits *tfiligen* he sleeps in the gorge. So to be thrown down the gorge gives you rest with God."

"If they never leave the cliffs, how do they eat?" Bo asked.

"Mountainpeople bring them whatever they need and throw them over when they die. It counts for Heaven and guarantees safe passage for everyone."

Bo looked for his next destination, a supposed place past the mouth of High Gorge; but it would be just another stopgap, another excuse to keep going. But to what end? he thought, feeling foolish for his blind pursuit of an impossible destiny. Unable to justify and determine his own course, he was like a spore on the wind. The fortune-sticks were wrong, he told himself. He would find nothing but Hrau and Hell and the darkness of space.

He looked down into the canyon. It was the jaw of a stone animal that had been locked in time, caught between breaths; and soon, Bo thought, in a few million years, it would move just enough to show the fire of life. The red sun would still be burning, exposing the entrails of the beast. But the toothless mouth of the canyon would remain open forever. Waiting to swallow *tfiligen*.

Hoping for a door through the next wall of rock or sky, Bo fought an impulse to jump into the canyon and rest with God.

SPREAD OUT ACROSS the tableland before them, the city was a silver and grey forest of twisted, broken, sky-

scrapers. Its mulch was the rubble and litter of a past age. Red scrub and tangleforest had reclaimed much of the outlying area. Mindless natural forces were slowly creating new cities of leaf and wood. Crawlers and tangle covered the acres of silvery skeletons, providing refuge for birds and night-beasts and chittering creatures.

This is dead land, Bo thought. The skyscrapers reminded him of Hraustops and ports. He thought of the Hrau's delicate pinnacles that seemed to corkscrew into the sky, bright ghostcastles that might be blown away by a mischievous child, except that they were stronger than sinew and rock. He remembered spiderwebs of light connecting spires in a moonlit night. But the broken buildings before him lacked the grace and lift of Hrau handiwork. This was a claustrophobic world of walls and narrow spaces, a city built for security.

"That's Citynine," Kezia said, pointing toward a two-mile dome that covered the northern corner of the city. It was a transparent hill that glistened in the morning sun, a perfect form that protected the silvery estate below. The buildings, straight as linelights, stood even and tall, uncorrupted by time and gravebreakers. But the eastern quadrant of the dome was opaque, as if the city was defending itself from the yellow sun with shadows.

"Does anyone live under the bubble?" Bo asked as they walked down an alley shadowed by four story buildings. He tried to lessen his anxiety about this place, but the buildings were crushing him with the weight and guilt of the past. He was out of synch here. This was a graveyard where ghosts hid in empty spaces, played on gusts of wind, only to become dustdevils sweeping along the

rubble and swirling in the air. Yet Bo felt that the city was straining to live. But ghosts and spirits could only be the dreams of the past.

"No one I'd want to meet," Kezia said.

They came to an open area spotted with brown moss. The sun tipped the distant high towers, glazed them gold and orange and dazzling white.

"But we won't have to go inside the City," she continued. "The tube-station is in *stad*."

"What?" asked Bo, watching Kezia's pet scuttle past him and disappear into a dark passageway. Another ghost, he thought.

"*Stad* means outlying parts. That is all the buildings around the City. We're in the south *stad*."

"Does anyone live here?" Bo asked.

"Only tribes." Kezia shook her head as if she felt free in this dead, sunny place, and asked, "Don't they have cities on Earth?"

"Not like this," he said, sensing her cues, waiting for her to explain 'tribes' in her own time, as was her way. She would communicate on her terms, or not at all. "I've never seen such a settlement. A city is a village, only packed with folk and towers. One wall meets another. Someone's ceiling is another's floor. Our cities are man-made hills, made out of stone and wood and scrap. Great stinking hives of folk. But at least they are filled with life. This place is too old to even be dead."

"Are there books and tapes in your cities?" Kezia asked.

"I don't know what tapes are," he said, "but I've seen books. I've seen scribes turn a page into a painting with swirls and dots." But he was daydreaming, recalling his first visits to York and Coosa. He remembered walking on cobble paths full of wagons

and folk and braying animals. Then, in the distance, the stone hills of the city. Ragged, many-peaked mountains made for folk. Children perched like birds on roofs, balconies, raised streets. He remembered walking across the top of Coosa as if he had been a ghost tagging on the wind.

"But don't you have *old* cities?" Kezia asked. "There must be some rubble and salvage, some artifacts of the old ways."

The old ways were buried as deep as the hole in the Earth, he thought—but he said, "And where a city ended, Hrau began." A Hrau cityscape still burned in the darkness of his memory. It was a light-sculpture of stars and towers and ringlets and walls adrift in autumn air. The world had been caught in stop-motion, but folk and human handiwork were lost.

"I was never allowed to enter Hrautown," Bo said. "Although it would have dagged my reputation, I wanted to pass into Hrausections, see ships and skyboats, slap across the earth in an Instanbox, and appear like a bolt in another city. Later, I shied around open ports. But a port is not a city. It's a dumping ground. Dead land surrounded by an emotion-wall."

"How did you get through Hrau?"

"I thought Hrau might be the way to get past the world, see what was wrong with everything," he said, almost in a whisper, as if the buildings and stunted trees could listen and send off messages with the wind. "But folk wouldn't let me work. I was hoisted in Coosa for asking. Working for Hrau is something you're ordered to do, something you do for community and flags, not for curiosity. So I became a 'beggar' and stayed away from flatlands, until I gave up and tried pushing into a port. Death and

dreams and pressure almost tore off my head, but somehow I dragged through. Even mingled with Hrau." But he was dropping names, making-up words for a new melody, an impossible vainglorious song. Folk would never believe a drifter who sang and faked legends about himself.

In the distance Bo could see shanties, hovel-huts, and lean-tos cobbled out of stone and wood and scraps of metal, all roughly covered with mud and leaves. Some were propped against the walls of blue-grey towers, others squatted under silvery, twisted frames like old vendorwomen waiting out a cold morning.

Still, Bo could not see anyone. Perhaps it was an abandoned village, he thought, remembering when he had slept in a deserted rebel wickiup.

"Be on the alert," Kezia said, "but no one will intentionally harm you. These are not mountain people; their tribes and customs make them different. They have no taste for what has been, or might have been. They live in a time before that. Their philosophers say that before words and ships and steel there is only dirt. A simple life. They turn a lathe, skip a few spools, and trade with Nineveh and farmers across Twin Mountain; but it's all play for them. They think that everything is funny, yet they never laugh. They ask no questions about the past. All they care about is from here to there"—she made an arc with her arm. "Just their dirt."

"Then where are they?" Bo asked as they walked on, finally reaching a village of thatched-roof hovels set like last season's birds' nests in the hollows and open spaces of broken towers. The silver skeletons and crumbling walls were like sentinels of the past, still commanding the human ballyrag below.

"Ayah," someone shouted, as if in response. It was a thin shrill voice that could have come from any direction. It was as if a ventriloquist was hiding in the ruins and throwing his voice on the wind.

Feeling pressure on the back of his neck, Bo turned around to find a silent crowd of boys and men with long sallow faces and wide dark eyes. Every smooth face was framed with thick black hair cropped sharply across the forehead and greasy earlocks that touched bare shoulders. Although most of the men wore ragged pants or hide breechcloths decorated with bits of metal, the boys were naked.

"Just keep walking," Kezia said. "They'll follow along. It's a joke."

"How do you know so much about these people?" Bo asked, looking into the empty, open dwellings.

"I lived with them for a time."

"And yet you never went under the bubble. Why?"

"Because every time I approached its edge something pushed at me, stoppered up my breath, gave me dreams while my eyes were open."

"What about your insect-animal?" Bo asked.

"It would not go near Citynine."

"I think Hrau must be there."

"No," Kezia said. "The tribes watch the city, and they have never seen Hraurau about. No, it must be the tribes inside the dome, or perhaps ancient machinery, or spirits."

It's Hrau, Bo thought, feeling uncomfortable under the stares of the quiet people behind him.

"Ayah," shouted girls and women as they stepped into the street and crowded Bo and Kezia. They shouted 'ayah' as if they didn't know another word, as if the sound was a charm, a magic. They chanted until Bo could

hear subtle resonances, ululations of 'ahs' that became sighs and signs and unformed words. A whole language in a breath, he thought. A melody couched in a drone. Compulsively, Bo supplied his own familiar words, using the chant as a baseline for his own melody.

But some of the voices were inside his head. He felt a familiar pressure, could almost make out words. The mix of whispers and static reminded him of the telepathic echoes of Hrau.

"I feel the 'noise,' too," Kezia said, brushing against him. "The tribes can talk a little inside their heads. You'll find no Hraurau here, so relax."

Bo tried to block the whispers with other thoughts. He watched the young girls dressed in furs and tattered frocks. They would run ahead, dance, roll around in the dust, then stand up with grey arms and faces. Their faces empty of expression, they would stand on their toes, as if they were peering over a wall.

They're like shaggy beasts, Bo thought, trying to find intelligence in their faces, yet still hearing the noise in his head. Bo remembered faces without life and looseness, but not on young girls with frizzy black hair and silver dangles around their necks. Dumbness was a mask, Bo thought, thinking of old people and animals.

Then with a loud cry the women ran ahead and joined the girls. They stood close together and blocked the roadway.

"That's what I thought," Kezia said. "They won't let you through without a joke. We'll never get to the tubes without their blessing."

As soon as the men closed in from the rear, Kezia began shouting at them. She waved her arms, made signs with her hands, then turned and spoke to the women. Bo could under-

stand a few of the words—they were words of affection and unity, but spoken with the hiss and rasp of a sweatmonger. When she finished talking, everyone remained silent, as if they were waiting for her to crack the towers with her fists, melt glass with her eyes.

She took a few polished stones from her pocket and tossed them to the ground. Then she crouched down, took off her shirts and binding straps, and rubbed her chest and shoulders with dirt.

"Rub yourself with dirt," Kezia said to Bo. "It's considered an act of submission and strength—that's part of the joke." As Bo rubbed the grey powder into his face, Kezia said, "You give them a piece of your spirit in return for family favor—I've already been pushed through the joke. But if they decided your spirit is too small, or they just don't like it, they'll kill you as a favor. That's part of the joke. They turn you back into dirt so you can grow again in another lifetime."

But Bo was preoccupied with the static in his head. The test was in the whispers and almost words that echoed as light in his mind. For an instant he saw sound, heard light, crawled through himself, and gave himself away out of curiosity and fear. He was sure they would kill him if he hid inside his head. So he 'settled in,' let them have his thoughts, followed the mumble of almost voices through tribal memories and a monochromatic universe of dreams.

He listened and walked as he slept.

"COME ON, get up," Kezia said, shaking him. She had donned her shirts, and her face was streaked with dirt and oil. "It's finished. You've dreamed enough for them. The children seem to be satisfied, but if you

sit too long you'll stay and dream the days with the tribe."

Bo giggled, having seen the joke, and stood up; but he was weak and dizzy, as if he were drugged or drunk. He stumbled. Dreams took him over again, apparitions roiled and coiled around him. He was lost, chased, and found by ghosts that had stopped the world for fun, that whispered and twisted him into other forms.

Ideas are easier than flesh, he thought, giggling again, remembering that he was in a hutch, a small dark ceremonial house. He remembered that Kezia had pulled him along, dragged him here in his sleep. People were still talking to him, staring at him, even as he moved around and pushed himself out of their dreams. He had been sitting on a mat of brown rushes beside a fire. A smoke hole in the thatched roof let in grey light, and Bo could see a patch of sky and a twisted beam that seemed to waver in the smoke.

It's a joke, he thought, trying to get back to his dreams after having seen enough 'out-there,' as the tribe-children called it. In this 'out-there,' he thought, everyone carried the dirt of his own tiny, happy death like a baby in the womb. That's the joke. Everyone is just waiting to climb out of stinking flesh and see over the edge of 'out-there.' But dreams and death clean everything up, take away the foolishness of life—that's the joke. You have to start all over again.

Kezia helped him out of the hutch, pulled him away from the jokes and dreams and comfortable children. But the dreams played on the edge of his consciousness. He had pushed through them, but he carried bits and pieces, ideas, memories of children's dreams and thoughts.

"That's the joke," he said to Kezia.

The tribe had gathered in the street outside the hutch. Everyone formed a tight circle around Bo and Kezia. Kezia talked with the women, then stepped out of her shoes and kicked them aside. "You must do the same," she said to Bo in a thick voice. Her face was relaxed, her eyes heavy-lidded, as if she were high-up on wine or beer or hish.

"Why?" Bo asked out of habit; but he was glad for habit. He needed the automatic and familiar to pull him out of his lethargy, give him pause to clear his thoughts and pull away the scrim of dream. Bo was seeing the bright stone and metal world through a dreamy haze.

"It's ceremony," Kezia said. "A show of faith. By leaving your shoes, you make this your home."

Then everyone just left, went back to their business of sleeping or eating or trading or dreaming the days. Bo and Kezia took a wide, cracked avenue; like the spoke of a wheel it would lead to the dome, the true, if not geographical, center of the dead city. There were no smiles or nods, no good-byes. It was over. The past lived in its own world. It was as if the ceremony and dreams had been dreams themselves, now forgotten.

A group of children ran ahead of Bo and Kezia. Bo noticed that the tallest girl was carrying the insect-animal under her arm, as was Kezia's habit.

"Where was your pet during the ceremonies?" Bo asked. They were out of the village and, once again, he felt claustrophobia, felt as if the dead buildings were about to topple over and crush him.

"It was beside you for a while. Then it left the hutch."

"The children are playing with it," Bo said.

"I know," Kezia replied. "It's the children who drive the tribe. They gave you your dreams, decided whether you'd be better off as dirt."

"Perhaps the children have made the dreamwall around the dome," Bo said. But then they would be as powerful as Hrau or machines. If folk could be as strong as these children, then Hrau might be broken, he thought. Perhaps there were folk such as this on Earth. But he had missed them, had spent all his time wandering about in his own dream, saw only familiar places and folk. Perhaps, he thought, this strength is inside all folk, buried like their deaths.

"No," she said. "You'll see it's not the children, although they have no trouble finding their way inside the dome. But even they must follow customs most of the time."

"What custom?"

"They stay on their own dirt. The dome belongs to another tribe. In the past there was tribal war. The joke almost decimated the *stad* tribes."

Then the dome tribe might be stronger than the *stad* children, Bo thought. But he was still under the spell of the hutch. The dreams still followed him, and his lungs burned from the smoke. Without shoes, every misplaced step was another pain; but pain, at least, would wake him up, keep him in the world. He was groggy, dulled out by smoke and transparent overlays of dreams which played like ghosts over everything he saw.

But he would push along, inhale the cold air of rational thought, and exhale questions. "I thought you said the tribe has no past, no memories," he said.

"They've talked themselves out of memory," Kezia said, "but their dreams and sleepwalk are not so re-

stricted. When everyone is dogged on smoke and starved so they can see behind their eyes, you can listen to four day history rhymes recited by ghosts in the hutch. They are spoken through children, and are not supposed to be remembered."

"Then why are they told at all?" he asked.

Kezia laughed and, still slurring her words, said: "Perhaps the rhymes are for Fauboughers to take along their way, and keep them away from domes."

Bo nodded, caught up in a dream, and said, "I'm too tired, and I'm hungry. I need to sleep. Now."

"It's not far," Kezia said, pulling his arm over her shoulder and supporting his weight. "If you stay here, even to sleep until red-night, you'll be overcome by dreams and jokes—the children won't let you alone until you can forget your name."

"Were you dreaming in the hutch?" Bo asked.

"No. The smoke only made me sleepy and numb. It opens you up so you can take other people's dreams, but they must be pushing them at you. No one was dreaming at me. They were seeing you. So I took a sleep."

They walked slowly, carefully. When they reached the squat building which was the entrance to the tube-station below, the yellow sun was at two o'clock in a clear sky. The shadows in alleyways and debris-strewn plazas were almost purple in contrast to the chalky dun towers and parthenons. Before them, in the distance, the dome rose about the *stad*. It was a perfect silver world, Bo thought. But it was pressed between a dead city and a sky owned by Hrau.

"The closer you get to the dome," Kezia said, "the harder it is to keep

your thoughts."

Bo could feel that same curious pressure that he had experienced when he had pushed his way through London Bogs and into the Hrauport. This place is the edge of the world, he thought. It's a crazy's dream of Drunk Row without folk. A chalk paradise for wind and scrub.

The children were waiting outside of the squat building. Some sat on the ground and stared at Bo and Kezia, others danced and played in the dusty street. Although they reminded Bo of ungainly foals, newborn and discovering the world, there was something very old about them. For an instant, Bo imagined that he was watching senile old folk playing games and pretending to be frisky children. They had grown old without aging, he thought. They had no past, only a dream present.

"Stay awake," Kezia said, "or they'll push you back into the tribe."

But Bo's thoughts were edged with dreams.

All the children gathered in front of the entranceway to the squat building. When Kezia approached them, they took off their sandals, all except the tall girl who was holding and petting the insect-animal. Unlike the rest of the children, she looked alert, and nervous. As Kezia looked at the sandals placed before her, the tall girl broke away from the group and carried off the insect-animals.

Kezia ignored the girl and picked out a pair of sandals. Her face looked empty, as if there was nothing but dead space behind her heavy-lidded eyes. She mumbled, "You can't leave here richer than you came."

"Stay awake," she shouted at Bo. She shook her head and made motions with her arms, as if she was trying to push away a dream that had

settled on her hands and face. "Take a pair of their strap-shoes and we can leave. We're even."

Then they pushed past the children, walked like somnambulists fighting their dreams. Bo found the joke and giggled. He would fall off the world. He felt the pressure of the nearby dome and the pull of the children.

"Why should I leave if I can see the joke?" he asked Kezia as they entered the squat building. But as they walked from one large room to another, down steps, past slidodoors forced halfway open and jammed with steel pieces, Bo forgot the joke and began to wake-up. After his mind cleared, he had to fight and think about every step—he had pushed himself too far. His body was fighting back. At the very least, he needed food.

They were in a large elevator room. Its walls were covered with coppery-brown climbers and moss. The floor was strewn with litter. A wan light radiated from floor, ceiling, and walls, transforming the climbers into golden arabesques. There's an acrid smell about this place, Bo thought. But there were no odors of life. He remembered the cloying human smells in shuttletrain stations on Earth. It had seemed as if the buildings had been alive, had made their own sweaty smells.

"The lift-down won't work in here either," Kezia said. "But there are stairs hereabouts to the 'underground.' I think they must be this way."

They found an operational slidodoor which gave them entrance into a small, pitch-dark room. Bo leaned against the wall while Kezia felt for a door.

"Here it is," she said, then went

back for Bo, and they carefully felt their way down the stairs. There would be no light here, not even the wan glow of a guideline—this world had been shut-down, broken by years and, perhaps, dust. Bo grinned, thinking about dust. It would grow into mountains, and the city would never have been. It would have to start again. Like him.

"I should have taken food in the *stad*," Bo said. "I don't know if I can keep walking." He spoke to hear his voice, maybe to break a silence that had been growing between them.

"It would have made you sick," Kezia said. She walked ahead of Bo, took some of his weight on her back. She stopped and pressed something into his hand.

"What's this?" he asked. "A pill?"

"It's yours. From the common house in Nineveh. I stole a few before they were confiscated, just in case I might need them." She paused, waiting for him to take the capsule, and said, "You would have had it earlier, but—"

"The dreams?"

"Yes," she said. "Another joke. I don't know when I began to dream. I think before we came into this building, perhaps it was when that girl ran away—I knew something was wrong then, but I couldn't respond."

"She took the insect-animal," Bo said.

"Yes, that I know. But I thought it had found its way back to me. You weren't with me—I thought that you were a part of the dream. I believed that you had been taken by the children; I even remember trying to pull you away, but you were already taking part in the tribe."

"Then you thought that this was the dream," Bo said.

"Yes," Kezia replied. She gave him

time to rest, then started down the stairs.

Although he felt stronger, he rested both hands on her shoulders. But in the darkness his touching could prove nothing. His hands could be ghosts pushing her down the corridors of dream. His voice could be that of a child talking in his sleep. "Why didn't you warn me about the tribes and the real nature of their 'jokes'?" he asked.

"I was almost certain that the tribe would test you. If I had warned you, then you might have pushed away their dreams, made walls with fear and imagination. They would have killed you for that. The joke had to be shared. Your best chance of survival was to be loose, relaxed, open without too many preconceptions."

"You told me about the tribe," Bo said. "You lied, said that they were harmless."

"I said they would not harm you on purpose. You were only a minute away from their dreams. I had to use my intuition, imagine how your mind might work. You didn't have much time to think about what I said—I knew that. But I had to give you something then. I wanted you to feel safe but be alert. If I had not told you they were harmless, you would have probably hid inside yourself when they barraged you with dreams. You had to be innocent, yet ready. So I lied to you at the last moment."

"But then you told me they would kill me if my spirit was too small," he said.

"You were already dreaming. You couldn't turn back then. I tried to get through your dreams, make you realize that you couldn't hide, even if the tribe threatened your memories."

"Thank you," Bo said.

"My father had once done the same

for me."

That rankled Bo. He felt the need to assert himself, take over, be free—he was trapped in here, not only by darkness, but by Kezia's presence.

"Here it is," she said as a slidedoor opened with a sigh. Everything was awash with blinding white light. They stepped into the tube station. Machines hummed. There wasn't any dust or rubble. Carry-robots stood ready near the train cradles. Nothing was wasted here. There were no frills, none of the Hrau's shifting perspectives, just the simplicity of utility.

Once inside the train, Bo was overwhelmed with fatigue. He fell asleep listening to the whisper of the train and imagined it was a thousand muffled voices, sticks falling in the wind—the whispers of his future.

His lungs hurt, and he coughed and dreamed about Heaven.

*Heaven was a silvery city. He was rolling stars down its streets. It was dark, except for the flaming baubles, but he glimpsed a face peering out a window.*

*He threw a white sun and saw that the face was grey.*

## ii

THE CITY WAS a grey hive. It was a world built for itself, a labyrinth of corridors and walkways, a monotony of busy faces and buzzing talk. Vendors toadied about, shops lined the enclosed streets, and the odors of stale food hung in the damp air.

"Do you know where we are?" Bo asked as they walked through an open area. There was a crackling overhead and blue sparks were falling like stars from a stone sky.

"This is *under-stad*," Kezia said. "The 'city' and Hraurau's port and towers are above."

"Then why don't we try to find our way up?"

"Because the animal is staying in *stad*."

"So what of that," Bo said.

"I think we'll be sure of our way if we follow the animal." Then Kezia fell silent.

Walking beside Kezia, Bo felt trapped. The streets were badly lit, and shadows turned them into tunnels and dead-ends. Gently, the world was pressing down. They followed the insect-animal.

But Bo could still remember waking up to its diamond eyes and the whispers of the train.

"HOW DID IT get in here?" he had asked Kezia. The animal had not been with them when they stepped into the train.

"It must have found the train before we did," she had said in a monotone, as if she was still being pulled by children's dreams. But Bo felt that something more subtle than dreams had been given time to grow inside his head—it was the selfsame whispering that he could sometimes hear when his thoughts were freewheeling at the edge of sleep.

Like a child, it gabbled as it grew.

Whatever it was, Bo had thought, Kezia was tied into it, and so tied to him. And they were both bound to the insect-animal.

THEY WALKED until they reached the deserted limits of the undercity *stad*. The buzz and soughing of machinery became louder. Rubble was scattered everywhere, as if hurricane winds had once blown through the corridors. As Bo passed the battered hulk of a carry-robot that glinted in an alleyway, he saw a mouselike animal scurry across the floor and run up the

wall to nest in the shadows.

Hrau had been here, he thought. The perspectives were wrong. What had been a wall a second ago was now an alley. It was as if the animal had climbed up the air.

Then the insect-animal disappeared into the wall ahead.

"Can you feel the pressure?" Kezia asked, walking as if each step was another agony.

"Yes," Bo said, trying to 'settle in' and feel his way. The pressure increased. He felt the first finger-jabs of nightmare, but he walked onward. It's another Hrau dreamwall, he thought as he pushed through dreams and imagined that he was wandering in a familiar forest under an egg-shell sky.

"This way," Kezia said, stepping through a wall, following the insect-animal.

"Wait," shouted Bo, but Kezia had disappeared. She knew nothing of Hrau, he thought.

He was still 'faking-it,' fighting Hrau dreamwalls by thinking about small towns and folk, good times in taverns, swill beer, sleeping on straw, leaves whirled by the wind in a yellow forest, girls with the same faces; and then he realized that the pressure had eased, the world had righted itself, walls touched ceilings and straight lines met in the distance.

But he was looking through the wall and standing in several places.

This must be a Hrau ruse, he thought, trying to pull himself away. He felt as if he were back in the Hraumachine. He was in two places at once, still trying to break out of programmed dreams.

—He looked up and saw Kezia's insect-animal staring at him from behind the scarred wooden basin. He could see his image reflected and distorted in its greenish-black eyes. Its

*eyes were prisms, breaking up the light of Bo's mind and memory.*

*—He was standing in the corridor and staring at a wall.*

*—He was kneeling over a basin in a common house in Nineveh.*

*—He was watching Kezia follow the insect-animal. It was like a game of hide-and-seek. Kezia was blind. All the traps were there. But she found her way through the Hrau's 'mix-up.' She ignored Hrau as she stepped through the city.*

Time had been spliced. Bo was alone. He was looking through the eyes and mind of the insect-animal. He watched the present through scrimps of alien perception. But he saw only conditions and transitions—there were no 'things.' His thoughts were not being composed out of the fabric of his human language. There were no ideas built with concrete nouns and pronouns. Language was now the inexorable slipping of condition to transition. A new frame of reference turned the world inside-out, knocked down old walls, created new ones.

Within the reaches of his fear, his thoughts etched signatures.

—Then the insect-animal is a sentient, telepathic being, he thought.

He heard Kezia's voice. Then took the bait. He imagined the wall was a door, stepped through, found himself in darkness. He listened.

*"I was almost certain that the tribe would test you," Kezia said. "If I had warned you, then you might have pushed away their dreams, made walls with fear and imagination. They would have killed you for that. The joke had to be shared. Your best chance of survival was to be loose, relaxed, open without too many preconceptions."*

Bo realized that he was listening to his own memories. The insect-animal

was pushing dreams at him; but he had to find Kezia. As if in a dream, he let the world happen to him. He relaxed his grip on the familiar and followed his thoughts. Became an eddy in time. Condition. Transition. There was nothing to cling to in the insect-animal's amorphous world. Faces and trees and stars and songs made no sense. It was as if he was being washed into a sea which hung in itself and was washed by itself.

—But that doesn't make sense, he thought, as he walked into a dim, high-ceilinged room. A metal tube hung from the ceiling; below it was a heap of broken glass and smashed instruments. Bo could almost see ghosts sitting in the chairs that formed a circle around the rubble. This room had probably not echoed human sounds for centuries, he thought. It was part of a world that had not yet been taken by Hrau. But this place knew no people.

Bo had been walking as if in a dream; he was a somnambulist dreaming his way through an imagined city. He was lost, and Kezia and the insect-animal could be anywhere in this world.

"Where are you?" Bo thought, hoping the insect-animal could hear his thoughts. But there was no response. "Where is Kezia?" Still no response. What kind of being could it be? Bo asked himself, wondering if the insect-animal was with Kezia. Kezia had never mentioned that it had such senses. Perhaps she didn't know.

*"Your best chance of survival was to be loose, open without too many preconceptions."*

Bo remembered Kezia's words. An alien presence, the insect-animal, was throwing dreams at him.

Again, he let the world happen to him; he knew no other way to reach

Kezia. He walked through corridors filled with rubble, rooms with no light. Gradually the air changed, and the rubble and dark rooms were behind him. He had reached Hrau quarters; it was as if he was back on the ship. A row of elevator squares glowed wanly at the end of the hall.

Without a thought, he stepped on a square. Bo followed the logic of dreams; yet he was aware that the insect-animal was guiding him.

Stepping off the square, he found himself in the open. A breeze chilled his face. A tree with long drooping branches cast its shadows across the floor of a deserted plaza. It was a cloudy red-night, and the world was burning in rosy light. The city was before him: an airy construction of cones, needles, stars, and squares stood against the red sky. Blue-black shadows tied a mirage of bubbles and spires to the ground. Every delicate shape was like a feather held aloft for a second, a beautiful second before the world would fall and the ghostly minarets would become a bright memory superimposed on a lowland of rubble and stone.

Bo's fear was the only hard edge in this soft world. He was pushing away the dreams. He had to think, make his own decisions. He could turn back, make his way through this world, find enough food, keep away from Hrau. He did not have to follow the insect-animal. Kezia would probably find her own way, make her own solitary destiny.

Something brushed against his leg. He stopped. The insect-animal settled on his foot; he felt a sudden revulsion, an urge to kick the animal away and throw it out of his mind. But it had gained too much ground.

"Where is Kezia?" he thought.

There was no reply. For all practi-

cal purposes, Bo thought, this was a dumb animal, a fluff that was attracted to him.

Then he was looking at the world through diamond eyes and following the being toward the lights.

He walked north-east and, as if in a trance or a dream, made his way into the city, passed under a skyscraper of towers and eggshell domes held aloft by barely visible thread beams. Bo followed his intuition, as if he could separate the thread of Kezia's presence out of the rush of sights and sounds. He stole into his surroundings, settled into the frenetic life around him. But Bo had his own power and tricks—he kept to the shadows and dark outcroppings, became too quiet to be noticed.

When Bo worked his way out of his trance, he could not find the insect-animal. He was walking along the edge of a roadway. Red and orange wildflowers grew out of the sandy soil; Bo stepped over them, as if his only goal was to reach the end of the road without crushing a flower.

Hrau dashed about on the streets and overstreets ahead. Bo could hear their telepathic static, a wild gibberish of whispers and buzzings set against a background of machinelike chatter.

He walked past Hrau. He was quiet as a shadow, a ghost without effect. Above him was a bridge of kiosks and towers, and beyond, on higher ground was the port. Its blue marker-lights were the cold stars of Heaven scattered upon a burning plain.

Bo cut across the road and boldly walked toward the port. He ignored Hrau, but didn't tune them out—just in case they might notice him. But red-night had broken the world into 'things;' he was simply another shadow walking through pale fire.

When he reached upper ground, he could see the mile wide pit, could even see the upper levels of the perpendicular cities inside.

Inside the pit was another ship, he thought. A fat king waiting in the darkness. Perhaps Kezia was there . . .

He walked across a smooth floor of fused stone that stretched to the edge of the pit. There was no one about. It was as if an invisible barrier separated the commerce of the vertical city from its horizontal neighbor.

Bo stood beside a row of elevator squares and stared downward into the pit. The filagree of light gave measure to the darkness which seemed to reach toward him like shadowy hands.

*"Take the first elevator square,"* said the insect-animal, but it was only a voice inside Bo's head. Bo felt vulnerable standing in the open. There was not even a breeze; it was as if the pit was belching dead air. He felt the pull of the darkness below. But he would not jump into the earth on the command of a voice in his head.

But he could not leave Kezia. His destiny was not on this facsimile Earth, and the only exit was the ship waiting below.

*"You have almost no time."*

Bo stepped on the elevator square.

And found himself inside the ship, inside another shuttle that would soon become part of a larger starship. Standing several paces beyond the high arch of an openway, he watched robot barges scud past him to slide their wares into the storage banks that reached to the ceiling.

Then he noticed the insect-animal beside his foot.

"Where is Kezia?" he asked, wondering why he had not seen the insect-animal before. Perhaps it had simply 'appeared,' Bo thought.

*"She is near."* said the insect-animal in its dream-language.

But Bo felt he was falling, listening to glass words with his hands, breathing liquids with his eyes. He was trapped again in the insect-animal's dreams.

*"I don't want you inside my head,"* Bo said.

*"But I will take you to your friend."*

Bo followed, as if in a daze. He tried to push himself out of the dreams, but he was too tired. If I can reach Kezia, then I can rest, he thought.

As they passed through a cellule of control boards and soughing machinery, Bo felt a familiar thrumming. The ship must be rising, he thought. He watched the insect-animal disappear into a corridor, and tried to remember his thoughts of a moment ago. It was as if the insect-animal's dreams had swallowed Bo's past.

He panicked. Then shouted, "Where are you?"

—Hrau might have heard that, he thought. He had to break away from the insect-animal. It was muddling his thoughts, leaching away his memories. But, he thought, how can I find Kezia without the animal?

He tried again, but without voice. He thought the words slowly and clearly: *"Where are you?"*

*"That question has little meaning,"* said the voice inside Bo's head. *"Time and space are merely relationships of phenomena. Space is the order of co-existing phenomena, as time is the order of successive phenomena."*

*"Where are you?"* Bo insisted, then looked down to see the insect-animal beside his foot. The being stared at him, its diamond eyes full of the cellule's harsh light. *"You are absolutely non-spacial,"* it said. *"Your 'body' is only a point-of-view."*

"But you're right here," Bo said. "I can see you."

*"The only thing you can see is yourself. You see what is in your program. I am a part of that program, but you don't see 'me'—you see what is inside you."*

Bo realized that he was caught in the insect-animal's dream. He felt secure, as if he could hide in the confine of a second. In the insect-animal's dream-language, an instant of time was long enough to hold a conversation.

But words and breath make time, Bo thought.

"Where there is light, I can see," Bo said. "I can touch objects 'out-there.' How can you ignore all of the senses?"

*"You misinterpret your senses and mistake mere appearance for reality."*

"Then how do you explain causes and effects?" Bo asked, following the insect-animal through brightly-lit corridors.

*"As a perceptual living mirror of the universe, you feel the effect of all that takes place,"* said the insect-animal. *"You influence others, but only ideally."*

"Ideally?"

*"Since no true substance can really act upon another, everything in the universe takes place as if mutual interaction was real. Whatever changes take place in you must be accompanied by corresponding changes in others. But what you might perceive clearly will be perceived as confusion by others."*

"It makes more sense to believe that the world is as it seems," Bo said. "Your world is like a fly caught in amber."

*"Within a fixed universe there is change. Perception is change, and every perception modifies everything else."*

That's the logic of dreams, Bo thought as he followed the insect-animal across a transparent bridge. For an instant he felt as if he were back in the *Fragrant Cloud*. Below him, crosshatchings of beams and cables hung in the white light. He imagined that the tiers that divided the area below were living areas for Kezia's skypeople. Like flatfish swimming in a great bowl, the robot barges skiffed back and forth.

*"Formfollower? Is that you?"*

Bo heard the voice inside his head. "Is that voice calling you?" he asked the insect-animal.

But the insect-animal had disappeared, leaving Bo with only a residue of its fear.

*"Where are you?"* Bo thought.

*"We've been discovered,"* said the insect-animal. *"Find the elevator squares ahead."*

Bo took a last look at the room below him. He glimpsed an alien standing beside a row of elevator squares. Its head was tilted upward; a diadem of pale blue eyes stared at Bo. Below the eyes was another coronet of single nostrils. The creature was covered with brown spines and it wore no clothes. Once again, its thoughts entered Bo's mind.

*"Formfollower,"* it said, *"there is no reason to be afraid. Convergence will restore your memories."*

It must be directing its thoughts at the insect-animal, Bo thought. He felt trapped in the alien's dream images: it was using the telepathic language of the insect-animal.

But only an instant passed before Bo's fear broke into his cold alien dreams. He turned and ran into the corridor, which gave the illusion of curving upward and twisting into a knot of white light.

*"Hurry,"* said the insect-animal, which was waiting for Bo beside an

avenue of elevator squares. As Bo stepped onto the end square, the insect-animal raised itself and, using its foreleg which resembled an arm with stump-fingers, punched out coordinates on the contiguous wall of colored squares and shifting lines.

Bo found himself in an empty, familiar room. He stepped off the square with the insect-animal and looked about. The curved ceiling was transparent. Bo could easily imagine that the blue and yellow stars above were the lights of a heavenly city. He looked at the clear booths before him and remembered that he had experienced their programmed dreams. He had killed a Hrau in a room like this. But that had been in another ship.

This shuttle will soon become part of a larger starship, Bo thought. "Where is Kezia?" Bo asked.

"She rests in the dark booth," said the insect-animal. "As you know, it is a safe place."

"I thought you did not believe in 'place?'"

"That is correct, but I must speak simply since you seem to perceive complexity as confusion. If I spoke in dreams, you would not remember."

And the insect-animal trapped Bo in a frozen ocean of dream.

"You'll be safe in the Hraumachine," it said.

Bo dreamed that he was wriggling into a clear Hraumachine as the insect-animal watched with prism eyes.

Bo was falling. Crashing into reefs of emptiness. He pushed through icy dreams and asked, "Are you Formfollower?"

"I don't know; I can't remember most of my past."

Inside the Hraumachine, Bo fell with his dreams. Spinning past all the mirrors of the world, he thought of

timepieces, ticking relics made by tinkers out of scrap for the town. Tinkering was a fool's profession, and as folk lore had it: one tick to a town was enough. God's time could be told by watching the sun move through its hours. Tickers and machines were the business of Hrau.

Bo imagined all the timepieces ticking together, pendulums swinging, as if God's hand was tapping them all . . .

"Every being and substance is in harmony with the other," said Formfollower, the insect-animal. "It is as if there is a mutual influence between them. Yet every substance and being follows its own predetermined laws."

Bo pushed through the thermoclines of sleep and dreams to ask another question. "Is the being with the circlet of eyes chasing you?" he asked Formfollower.

But there was no response. Bo was trapped in a dark booth. He dreamed programmed dreams.

The Hraumachine had taken over.

iii

BO LEANED against Kezia's booth and waited. He looked through the transparent ceiling at the strange constellations, scattered bits of ice in a dead Heaven. He imagined his own memories were silvernubs swimming through grey shoals, but the water was fast and his own reflection hid the darting fish. He could not make sense of Formfollower's dream-language. It frustrated him that the events of the last few hours were not clear in his mind.

He looked around the room: the translucent Hraumachines looked like headstones made of ice. Hurry, Kezia, he thought as he turned and tried to look into her dark booth.

Then the ship became completely silent. Bo listened for its familiar thrum of life, but could hear only his own shallow breathing.

And like a fist, something slammed into the observation room. The far wall opposite Bo began to fissure and then fold. The symmetrical pattern of slanting folds and faults worked its way to the ceiling.

Then the thrumming began, as if the ship had been given new life by a god whose pleasure was geometry.

"What happened?" Bo thought, hoping Formfollower, the insect-animal, could hear his thoughts.

"If the torus is defective," Formfollower said, "then it could be pulsing benders throughout the ship."

Again Bo was touched by Formfollower's dreams. And as if in a dream, he understood everything that was said. He recollected the past as being sequences of endless transitions and conditions. In his dream state he could mine Formfollowers's memory. He understood that the geometry of space is changed by a gravitational field. Although the ship could not accelerate past the optic limit, it collapsed distance by folding the fabric of space-time.

The ship was a huge animal with endless thoughts and lives, Bo thought. But like the Hrau, it was a weakling trying to trick the universe with illusive powers.

The voice inside his head became silent, and Bo was once again alone in the room. He could hear his own thoughts and fears as a rumbling in his ears. He stared at the regular patterns of folds and faults on the opposite wall. The wall seemed to stare back at him.

Soon, Bo thought, I'll panic, and be swallowed into the wall's geometry.

Kezia's booth cleared and a

slidepanel slid open. He could smell her stale perspiration as if it was an earthy miasma.

"Don't be afraid," Bo said as he helped Kezia out of the booth. "You were only having dreams."

"What is this place?" Kezia asked. She looked around the room, turning her face this way and that, as if she was a machine running through a programme of tight jerky motions. Then, in a breath, she took control of herself and stood still. She stared at the patterns and reflecting surfaces of the ruined wall.

"We're in a Hrauship. Don't you remember?—you followed the insect-animal through *understad*, then through the Hrau city. I followed, looking for you."

"Where's the insect-animal?" Kezia asked. Her face and hair were still powdered with the grey dirt of the *stad*.

Bo told her what had happened, told her about the alien that called the insect-animal 'Formfollower,' but she could not believe that her pet was telepathic, could not remember being led past Hrau and into the heart of their port.

"You are dreaming," she said. "If the insect-animal was about, I would see it. I am listening, but cannot hear its thoughts." Her words were forced, full of gutturals and harsh sibilation.

"Formfollower, where are you?" Bo thought, but the insect-animal did not respond.

"I think the insect-animal is dead," Kezia said. "Probably killed by the same thing that altered the wall. If that's true, we're lost."

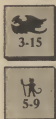
"Formfollower, where are you?" The world became silent. Bo could not even hear Kezia's breathing. She was a painted icon in a monochromatic room, a figurine created to lean

(cont. on page 82)



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# NOBODY LEAVES NEW PITTSBURG

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

*George Martin's most recently published stories here were "The Computer Cried Charge!" (January) and "Men of Greywater Station" (with Howard Waldrop) (March). Martin returns with a grim story about the uses to which human life may be put on man's next frontier . . .*

FOUR OF THEM waited in the drizzling rain of New Pittsburg; four who walked and breathed. But only one lived, and only the living moved with purpose. His name was Sykes, a whip-thin young man with dark eyes set in an angular face, and he was impatient. The others didn't mind. The rain was nothing to them. They'd given up feeling long ago, with their lives.

But Sykes felt the rain, leaking from the gray above in tiny droplets almost fine enough to be a mist. And he remembered it as he felt it, remembered how it tasted of rust and acid, how it stung when it hit bare skin. Once he'd hated that rain, as he'd hated New Pittsburg, but now there was only contempt. New Pittsburg wasn't worth hatred.

"Move it," he snapped at last. He was hot, wet, tired of waiting. His papers weren't *that* interesting.

The spaceport guard looked up in faint surprise from the window of the gate control booth. Unused to being snapped at, he eyed Sykes and the three corpses curiously for a moment. Then he shrugged, folded up the pa-

pers, and handed them back. "Welcome to New Pittsburg," he said without conviction.

Sykes smiled: a quick cold slash across his face. "Welcome back, you mean. But I'm not staying."

"Yeah," said the guard, not really interested. "That's what they all say. Nobody's staying, but nobody ever leaves." He shrugged again. "Company office will be open tomorrow morning. They'll have work for you. Meantime, if you need a place to stay . . ."

"I have a place to stay. I was born here. You can skip the recital about deadman offenses, too. I know that shit."

The guard shot him another curious look. "Born here?"

"Yes. People do leave. The smart people."

"You're not so smart," the guard said. "You came back."

Sykes frowned, but did not reply. He was getting bored with the conversation. There were more important things to do.

The guard threw the switch to kill the electricity on the ten-foot high

spaceport fence. Then he swung a sonic screechrifle over his shoulders, came outside, and unlocked the gate. Sykes strode through quickly. The three corpses shuffled behind him, their steps clumsy echoes of his own as he walked them through the corpse controller snug on his belt.

Outside, he paused. He was back on New Pittsburg.

The town was as dreary as ever. It was an afterthought, almost, sandwiched in awkwardly between the spacefield and the mountains. And it was ugly. Three years hadn't changed that. The buildings were shoeboxes of corrugated duralloy that had never been meant to be permanent, but were. The streets and sidewalks were flat gray plastoid, pitted and worn by the constant drizzling rusttrain. They matched the monotony of the flat gray sky.

It wasn't that color was illegal on New Pittsburg, Sykes reflected, though it sometimes seemed so. When he was a kid, the only bright color he remembered seeing was the color of blood. And even that seemed grayish at times.

He stood and looked down the dismal street and thought. His father had landed like this, some thirty-odd standard years ago. With a bigger corpse crew than Sykes had now. With hope, but not much brains, and less knowledge. So the Company grabbed him by the balls, and never let go.

The Company was tough. But Sykes thought he was tougher. He was ready for New Pittsburg. He was here for one night; no longer.

He stirred, and moved towards the building closest to the spaceport. A warehouse, from the outside, but Sykes remembered what it really was: the Company deadman depot.



The reception room was small and filthy, the grime-encrusted plastic counter untended. But there was a bell. Sykes hit it. Hard.

Then he waited. The corpses waited too, just inside the door, unmoving. Eyes blank and empty, arms limp. You didn't need to see the metal plate in the back of a man's skull to know he was a deadman. A glance would do.

They had no names, the corpses. Not anymore. They had forfeited their names with their lives, when they committed their crimes or had their accidents. Death had come on dingy corpseyard operating tables, where their brains—crippled, criminal, troublemaking—were ripped out and destroyed. Then they rose again, with corpse pseudominds in their skulls to command the still-living bodies. The newborn dead; the cheapest labor of all. As men, they'd built up a debt to society. They paid it off with their lives and their bodies. You didn't waste anything in this universe, and the bodies of condemned criminals made valuable machines.

Some corpse handlers gave their crews nicknames, but that sort of sentimental nonsense was not for Sykes. His father had been sentimental, and a loser. Sykes was a cold winner. Deadmen were mindless hunks of flesh, property. He treated them as such.

He owned three, a large crew for a handler his age. The first he'd gotten by luck, a withered oldster picked up in a game of psychodice. The corpse had lost his right arm long before Sykes won him. He was nearly worthless.

The second was something else; a seven-foot giant, a muscleman with broad shoulders and thick, corded arms. Sykes had saved for two years

to buy him, but it was worth it. He was a prize, a first-class corpse, top meat.

The third was a recent buy. Young, flaming red hair, a once-handsome face; average quality, a little soft but he'd toughen in time, and he had a long deadlife ahead of him. Besides, he'd been a bargain. Sykes bought him on Vendalia, where harsh laws made corpses common and dirt cheap.

There was a noise. Behind the counter a door popped open and a stubby little man stepped through. He wore the white smock of a corpse technician, now blood-stained, and he was peeling off a pair of gloves as he walked. Sykes didn't know him. He felt vaguely let down. When he left, the technician had been Banner, fat Banner with the beard and the big laugh, who'd predicted more than once that Sykes would wind up on his table. But he'd also given Sykes a controller to play with, and shown him how to handle a deadman. Something his father would never do.

"I rang for the depot man," Sykes said. "I've got three corpses to flop."

The small man slapped his gloves down on the counter. "I am the depot man. Tech, too. We do double duty around here. The Company likes hard workers." He eyed the corpses. "A company dollar a night for each," he said, "and we take no responsibility for damage." He took out a form and a pencil and pushed them across the counter. "And you'll want to convert your money. I'll do it for you. On New Pittsburg we use company dollars. Rate's three stellars for two dollars."

Sykes didn't like the man. He stifled the urge to ask what had happened to Banner and the old depot clerk. "That's pretty high," he said,

toying. "What if I don't want to convert?"

"Got to," the small man snapped. "Company rules."

Sykes smiled his cold smile. He knew all about Company rules. The New Pittsburgh Company had opened the planet, and it still owned it. It had political as well as economic clout, and its rules had the force of law. Earth, with its guidelines and settlement company regulations, was long light years away.

Sykes knew about conversion rates, too. His father had arrived here with a pocket full of Vendalian stellars. The pocket had been a lot roomier after conversion.

But Sykes was smarter than his father; he was ready. "That's all right," he said, pulling a fat roll of bills from his coverall pocket. "I converted already. On Vendalia. At the real rate." He smiled again, enjoying it, and pushed three bills at the small man.

The Company man looked up sharply. But he took the bills. Then he opened a gate in the counter. "This way," he said.

Sykes followed him behind the counter and through a door. The corpses came after, walking with a slow, clumsy gait. It was Sykes who walked them, really. A corpse handler sent impulses to the controller at his belt in the same half-thinking way he sent impulses to his own muscles. The psi circuit in the controller picked up the commands and relayed them to the corpse pseudomind. Then, amplified, the impulses went out to the nerves and the tendons and the muscles of the body. And the deadmen walked.

They could do other things, too; swing a pick, lift a crate, carry a load, run a machine. Lots of things, de-

pending on the skill of the handler. Walking a corpse-crew was easy, but having three or four deadmen at work on three or four different tasks was a feat of a different order. Like running four bodies at once.

Behind the reception room was a long corridor, then another door. Then the warehouse, huge and dark and rank with the smell of corpse-flesh. Light poured in through an open door and Sykes could see corpses sprawled everywhere. They covered the floor in piles, flopping all over each other, until the piles stretched away into the darkness. A few were lying in the slop troughs that lined one wall. If the stink was any indication, there were thousands of deadmen littering the warehouse floor.

"Flop 'em down anywhere," the small man told Sykes. "Pick them up in the morning, though, or you pay extra."

Sykes glanced at him coldly. The deadman depot was worse than he remembered, much worse. He was annoyed, but he kept his voice even. "Where do you get off charging a dollar for *this*?"

"What do you want? Beds? Makes no difference to *them*!"

"Most places have boards, wood bunks, shelves. Something. You used to."

Again the small man eyed him sharply. "Yeah. Well, it got crowded. And this isn't most places. They can't feel a thing anyway. Flop 'em, I said."

"Right by the door?," Sykes said. He laughed lightly. "So they get stepped on by thousands of corpses coming out? I get here late and they're ruined." He shook his head.

"We're not responsible for damage. Flop 'em anywhere you like." The

small man turned and left.

Sykes touched his controller and snapped a silent mental command. His three deadmen stumbled forward, almost in step, trodding on limp uncomplaining bodies as they walked across the huge room. When they were deep enough into the darkness so they had a reasonable chance to avoid being trampled, Sykes disengaged his mind and the corpses did an ungainly flop. They would not move again until he moved them. The pseudominds kept their hearts beating and their lungs at work, but Sykes was their will. They were tuned to his controller, and his alone.

He thumbed the belt-box off and returned to the reception room. The small man was putting on his gloves. Behind him, the second door was open. Sykes got a glance of a body, face down on a white table, with a shining-new metal plate in its skull.

Memories came back in a rush, of the other bodies he'd seen in that room. Of the time Banner had let him watch a conversion. Hardly ten, he'd cowered in the corner, wearing a surgical mask and an oversized smock. Two Company policeman, stern in blue and black, carried the man in from their wagon. He'd already been drugged. He was heavy, hard-faced, with hair like dark fine wire, and he'd killed a Company officer. Sykes knew him vaguely. His name had been Karpov, and he'd worked as a hired handler. The police had dropped him on the table, and Banner went to work quickly; shaving his skull, attaching a tangle of tubes and instruments, setting up a stasis-field to keep the life in the body. Then, from behind, he'd cut through the skull, down into the brain, slicing at it, removing it deftly, piece by piece. The machines kept the body going.

Banner, his gloved hands very sure, took a pseudomind from its case, set to work hooking it up with the spinal column and the nerve endings. Sykes had been too far away to see exactly what he'd done.

Afterwards, when the steel plate had locked the pseudomind into place and the body was breathing normally again without the support machines, Sykes had come close and touched it. The skin had been warm, and he felt a pulse. "He's not dead," he said, suddenly not understanding.

Banner, his mask off, only laughed his big laugh. "Body isn't," he said. "But Karpov is." Then he'd picked up a controller, tuned it to the new-mind pseudomind. And Karpov's corpse had risen and chased Sykes out the door.

It all came back then, as Sykes stared at the body through the open door, and wondered if this small man ever used his corpses to frighten kids. But he put the thought away. "Don't tell me you left a customer waiting while you took care of me?" he said.

The small man flexed his fingers, looked up, and frowned. "He's all done. Got the pseudo in. Now all I gotta do is tune it to a controller."

"What'd you get him for?" Sykes asked, hoping it wasn't anyone he'd known. There were a lot of old friends who'd been headed for the table when he left.

"Assault on a Company officer," the small man said. Sykes tried not to show his surprise. Three years ago, simple assault hadn't been a deadman offense. New Pittsburg was getting tougher. Each world had its own list of deadman offenses, crimes that would make a man a corpse. The list was longest on the raw new colonies where machines were expensive and labor scarce. And it looked like condi-

tions were worsening on New Pittsburg.

The depot man vanished behind the operating room door. Sykes stepped outside. Night had come, but it was still raining a rusty drizzle. And it was still hot. Lights burned in the windows of several of the grim metal buildings that lined the street. Most of the lights didn't interest him. He knew the one he wanted.

It was a tavern-restaurant, well-lit and noisy but nearly empty. The long mockwood bar was occupied by only two customers, and the scattered tables were deserted.

Customers and barkeep both looked up when Sykes entered and eyed him with open curiosity. The short silence was broken by one of the patrons, a man Sykes had never seen before. "You're new," he said.

"Not really," said Sykes. He looked at the barkeep, a tall man with a craggy face and wide shoulders slightly stopped by age. "Looks like business is off, Rob."

The bartender had been staring at him. Now he started. "Sykes," he said. "My God. Glen Sykes." He gaped, then broke into a smile, and offered a huge rough hand.

Sykes took it, clasped, and smiled back. Not his usual cold slash this time, no, something warmer, gentler, less certain. And almost involuntary. A slow curl at the corners of his mouth. "A long time," he said. "Three full years." Kenyon, the big barkeep, nodded numbly.

Then one of the customers was on her feet, offering her own hand. "Remember me?" she asked when Sykes turned her away.

Sykes studied her. She was gaunt, middle-aged, with baggy clothes and a hook nose. "Sure," he said. "Sal something or other. Corpse handler. You

were new just about when I left."

"Right," the woman said. She gestured towards her drinking companion, the man who'd accused Sykes of being new. "That's Eddie. He's been here two years or so."

Sykes gave him a nod, then turned quickly back to Kenyon. "Where's everybody else? Mueller, and Cathy? And the Slob? And Dave Anderson, and Roy? And Banner, dammit? I went by the depot and some new guy was in charge."

"Banner's dead," Kenyon said. "Keeled over about a year ago. Right at work too. Fell on his own table. Everybody said they should of made a deadman outta him. The Slob's dead too. Her whole crew got wiped out in a mine flood. We've had a lotta wipe-outs the last couple years, Glen. Things been getting worse since you left."

Sykes pulled up a barstool and sat down, nodding. "I noticed. Electric fence round the spacefield and no shelves in the depot. And a corpse tech doubling as depot man. Banner never would have done that."

"Banner *did* do that," Kenyon said. "Company changed things about a year-and-a-half ago, before he died. He had no choice. He was Company, but they pushed him around too. You know how it was. Profits have been going down, things are more marginal than ever. Company's really in a panic."

Sykes nodded again. "Figures. It's hard to see this place getting worse. It was bad enough when I was here. But it figures. What else has been going on?"

"Mueller's still around," Kenyon told him. "He's in the mills now, working a Company eight-crew. Always was a good handler. Cathy wound up marrying Roy Anderson."

"Roy? Thought it was Dave she was hot for."

Kenyon shrugged. "Guess she cooled. Haven't seen her or Roy for a while, to tell the truth. But Dave still comes around. Mueller too. They'll probably be in later."

"I can wait," Sykes said. "Meanwhile, I'll have a beer."

Kenyon drew a glass slowly and set it down. "What about you, Glen? What have you been doing? I never expected to see you back on New Pittsburg."

The beer was strong and dark, but it had a bitter aftertaste that Sykes didn't recall from the old days. Still, it was beer. He quaffed it down and ordered another.

"I never expected to come back," he told Kenyon when the barkeep set down the second glass. "Not sure why I did. I'm just passing through, really. Spent the last year on Vendalia, but I didn't like it much. It's a bad place. They need corpses something fierce for these big wilderness campaigns. So they've got deadman laws, rough ones. One wrong step and you're on the table."

"I've heard," Kenyon said. "It's getting worse here too."

"So I learned. The Company tech tells me assault's a deadman offense now. *Shit*."

Kenyon shook his head. "Not just assault, Glen. Assault on a Company officer. They had a couple mine bosses beat up pretty good after a few of those floods."

"Of course," Sykes said. "Makes sense. Had something like that on Skrakky, too. I was there before Vendalia. The whole damned planet is covered by factories, mills, strip mines, and everything is sulfur. The atmosphere wasn't so good anyway, so they figured there's be no harm in

polluting it, I guess. But now they can't get people to work there. Just corpse crews."

He finished his second beer and shoved the empty across the bar. Kenyon took it and refilled it. "Is that what you do, Glen?" he said. "Work a corpse crew?"

Sykes nodded. "Yes," he said, a little belligerently. "Never knew that, did you, Rob? Banner taught me how to handle. I've got my own crew now, three of them. And I've got money saved. I'm going places, Kenyon, just like I said I would."

Eddie, the stranger, laughed suddenly. "Going places? And you come back here? You're either crazy or stupid."

"I'm here for one night," Sykes said. "One night only. I leave tomorrow. I know all about New Pittsburg. My father came here to work a few months. He never left. But I left. And I'll leave again. This place isn't getting its claws into me."

Eddie smirked and went back to his drink. Sal nodded. "Keep thinking that way," she said. "Get out while you can."

"You don't have to warn me. I was born here, remember?"

"Yeah," said Sal, "But it's worse now. When I got here, I was staying just long enough to earn passage money. Figured it'd be easy. I had a five-crew. A five-crew. dammit!"

Sykes smiled: the cold version. He remembered Sal better now. The woman had been a new arrival when he left, a cool swaggering independent handler who was going to teach the natives how to deal with the Company.

"I'll bet you had trouble finding work," Sykes said.

Sal's face twisted with unreadable emotion. "Oh, I got work all right.

But not until I was nearly flat. The Company waited until I was desperate, then they offered me mine work."

"And you jumped at it," Sykes said.

"Damn right," Sal said. She laughed, a thin crackly sound that grated on the ears. "Pay wasn't bad. Regular corpse handler's fees, plus day labor for five deadmen."

Sykes didn't know the details, but he could guess the rest of the script. It was a very old story, and fools like Sal were always around to star in it. His father had played the lead once, in an earlier version.

"Nobody ever told me expenses would be so damned high," Sal continued bitterly. "Rent. Depot fees. Imported food, 'cause nothing grows on this muckhole. Even though I was working, the money seemed to go as fast as I got it. And the work was rough on the corpses."

"It always is," Sykes said. He'd learned that long ago, but big mouths like Mueller and the Slob never quite understood what was being done to them. "The Company gives the dirty jobs and the risk to the independent crews. The safe jobs go to Company corpses under hired handlers."

"One of my corpses had a hand chewed off by an automole the first week. The first week! Year later, I lose two of my crew in a mine flood."

"Tough."

Sal, encouraged, lifted her drink, continued. "I still had three corpses, a little money, but the mine work was getting to me. I tried for a transfer. The Company offered me a deal. They'd move me to the mills if I sold them a corpse. So I did."

Sykes was getting bored by the hard-luck story. "That was stupid," he said. "Not unusual, mind you. But stupid."

Sal squinted at him, half puzzled. She'd expected sympathy. It was a New Pittsburg tradition for the handlers to sit around in bars and cry over what the Company had done to them. But Sykes refused to play.

"You don't know what it's like down there, Sykes," Sal said, a little uncertainly. "The rain seeps down into the ground, and you're knee deep in water most of the time. And it's hot. Suffocating. The machinery is junk—old, unreliable, no safety precautions. I've seen more than one automole go beserk and chew up its crew instead of the rock."

Kenyon had been listening to the whole exchange. "It's the same junk your father worked with, Glen, only older," the barkeep said while refilling his glass. "The Company's been cutting corners, running things even cheaper than before. Ramshackle machinery, corpse labor, dirt wages—all part of it."

Sykes sipped the beer carefully and put it down with a smug smile. "Sure," he said. "But none of that's new. You just have to know how to deal with it." He turned back to Sal. "You don't have to go on. Just tell me how many corpses you've got left?"

"None." She said it reluctantly. "I'm a hired handler."

"And you had a five crew," Sykes said. His voice was a whip. "So what did you do? Sold them one by one, let the money slip away. If you'd had any brains, you would have sold them all at once. Gotten enough money for a ticket offworld."

"A handler don't sell her crew," Sal said stubbornly. "Not if it can be helped."

"Here it *can't* be helped. How long does any independent last on New Pittsburg? You stay here, the only question is whether you do it smart or

stupid. You did it stupid."

Sal's face, already blurred by drink, got ugly. "You talk smart, but your father didn't do much better from all I hear."

"No," Sykes admitted. He was getting a bit drunk himself. "I did, though. I got out. I left New Pittsburg."

That shut Sal up. Kenyon, sensing the strain, took over and led the talk to safer channels. "Where you going now, Glen?" he asked.

"Out along the Arm," Sykes said. "They just opened up a new world out there, a place called Slagg. The settlement company is looking for handlers. I hear it's awful hot, but the money is good. I figure I'll try that for a while, then move on. To Mountainholme, maybe. I've heard a lot about it. A resort planet. They say it's really nice. Maybe I'll settle there."

Rob Kenyon was polishing a glass, looking thoughtful. "As a handler?" he said.

Sykes' grin had no humor; he knew what Kenyon meant. Deadmen were barred from Mountainholme. And handlers, though admitted, were treated icily. It was the same on most of the 'civilized' worlds. The good citizens called corpse handlers "meatminds"—though not to their faces—and saw the whole profession as unclean. Old Earth was like that too. And Newholme and Silversky and Zephyr. All the older, richer colonies, in fact. On those mature worlds, any sort of capital punishment was unheard of, and the particular brand used to fashion deadmen was considered particularly grisly.

In a way, it was ironic. The process had originally been discovered on Old Earth itself, almost by accident. A man, his brains smashed out by a bullet, had reached a medical center

while his body was still alive. *He* was dead, hopelessly; but the doctors decided to try to keep the still-healthy body alive for possible use in a brain transplant. The first, experimental pseudomind was installed. And it worked; the body lived.

Only then, before any call came for a brain transplant, one experimenter tried fitting a psionic circuit to the pseudomind. He got a human robot; he called it a deadman. Later, corpse.

More corpses were made, better ones, after that. The uses were obvious. But so were the reactions. The experimenters suddenly became pariahs. One medical center after another stopped research. And, less than five years after the process had been discovered, Old Earth banned it. Newholme, its oldest daughter, followed suit. And the others, one by one.

But not *all* the others. The newer worlds—the far-out ones, the untamed ones, the unpleasant ones—needed hands badly. Corpse crews were welcomed. There the process was continued, in the hands of medical paraprofessionals who came to be called corpse techs. They created the deadmen, and tended them, but pseudomind research stopped; the colonial techs lacked the sophistication for that.

The oldest corpse was less than a century old, but already institutions had arisen. Deadman depots. Corpseyards. Meathouses. Deadman offenses. The corpse crews took over the work that was too disagreeable for men and too hard for all but the most expensive machines. They became the cheapest, crudest labor of all.

Crude. That was the word for corpse labor. And to many, for corpse handlers. That was why Sykes would not be welcomed on Mountainholme.

That was why they'd whisper "meat-mind" and "ghoul" behind his back. But he still intended to go.

"I'm not always going to be a handler," he told Kenyon, sharply. "Just for a while. Until I get enough money together. Then I'll go to Mountainholme and take up something else." He smiled. "Maybe I'll be a bartender."

Kenyon was looking at him. "Your father didn't want you to be a handler at all," he said. "That's why he wouldn't teach you."

Sykes shrugged. "He should have tried teaching me something else, then. Instead he sold all his corpses, skimped away his life as a hired handler, and died. That did me a lot of good. Left me here on New Pittsburg with nothing."

"Money," Kenyon said. "He left you some money."

"Not nearly enough for passage offplanet," Sykes said. "I got that myself, my own ways."

"You're right, Glen. I can't argue with you. But your father meant well. Didn't want you to wind up on New Pittsburg, not one bit, not one moment. He just didn't know how to get you off, is all." He smiled. "That you did by yourself. You're sort of famous, you know. The guy that got away. I guess the rest of us could do it too, if we really tried. But we've built up ties. Even to a place like this, you build ties. And they're hard to cut. You're different, I guess. You were always a loner."

Sykes acknowledged that with a nod. "I said I'd get away, and I did." He looked very pleased.

Kenyon sighed, looked at him strangely, and reached for his glass to fill it once again. Just then there was a sound at the door. A group of men shuffled in out of the rain, led by a

huge grizzly of a man in a handler's coverall. He took one look at Sykes and roared. "Glen! You goddamn little asshole, you! Whatinthe hell are you doing back here?"

Sykes looked at him and smiled his second smile, the real one. "Hi, Mueller," he said, laughing. "You haven't changed a bit. . ."

**T**HEY DRANK until closing, him and Mueller and the Andersons, who came in later, and others, friends and enemies and people that Sykes had long ago forgotten. Then they went to Kenyon's apartment behind the tavern and drank some more, and big mouth Mueller laughed uproariously and told stories about the old days and dirty jokes about his corpses and asked Sykes what the tail was like on Vendalia and Skrakky. Then, finally, Mueller passed out and the others left and Sykes got some sleep.

But he was up before dawn. He woke Kenyon and spoke to him briefly, borrowing a worn raincape and asking directions. He said goodbye, too. That was his last night on New Pittsburg.

The graveyard was way beyond the town, sprawling over two hills and the valley in between. Sykes walked there, in the rain, thinking. The tombstones had been real stones, in the old days. Now they cast them of the same grey plastoid they used for the sidewalks. The constant rustrain had eaten away at them, and already the letters were dissolving. In another three years, they'd be gone.

But Sykes found the right marker; a pitted slab graven with the name DONALD SYKES. He cursed the plastoid tombstone, and the Company, and New Pittsburg. And he stood there silent in his cape, while the rain fell around him and bit at bare skin,

(cont. on page 43)

# SALTY FOR THE CAT

CHARLES DE VET

*Charles De Vet will be remembered by long-time readers as an infrequently-appearing author of memorable stories; in his first appearance here in many years he describes an alien life-cycle and how it impinges upon the ambitions of one man . . .*

**Illustrated by Rick Bryant**

SOMETIME DURING the late afternoon the rain let up and a damp breeze drifted in from the sea. On the breeze rode the scent of a female.

Ckx crawled from his sleeping place beneath a ground vine and tested the air with widespread nostrils. He began walking toward the seashore, traveling nearly two miles before reaching the source of the scent.

The female!

She stood hip deep in the water, with her head raised and her arms rigid at her sides, beautiful as only a female in her mating time can be beautiful. Ckx restrained a sudden rush of desire, so acute as to be a tormenting hunger.

He walked closer. Carefully. Only a brief flick of the female's blue eyes in his direction betrayed her awareness of his presence. At the water's edge he hesitated. If she fled now she was lost to him, for he could never capture her here in the sea where she lived.

After what seemed much longer than it was the female turned her gaze directly at Ckx. In her eyes were anxiety, fear, and a dull despair, yet overriding it all was—invitation.

Still very tentatively, Ckx eased

into the water and move toward her, a low reassuring croon in his throat. When he reached her he stroked her pink fur with gentle hands. For a moment she stood still, with her eyes closed, before the tension left her body and her arms crept around him. He felt her fingers lock at his back. Their lips sealed and the female grew quickly aggressive, pushing Ckx backwards into the water in the ardor of her response to their joining.

She propelled them farther from the shore with kicks of her webbed feet, while the suction force of her kiss increased. Ckx replied in kind. For the moment he won, and a stream of acid drained from her mouth into his, burning a track of exquisite anguish down his throat.

Ckx felt the female maneuvering them for the consumation plunge and had time only for one deep breath before they dove toward the sea bottom. Down and down, while the acid, now in Ckx' stomach, did its ravishing work. The female continued her urgent suction.

Abruptly, in a burst of all enveloping, sense-obliterating ecstasy something inside let go, and acid, fluid, and a small bit of wriggling flesh

rushed up and across, and into the female's digestive tract.

The oxygen in Ckx' bloodstream neared its exhaustion and he fought to break the female's grip, but only when her body first tightened then went limp was he able to free himself. He stroked powerfully upward and broke the surface of the water, alone. He rested for a moment gasping in air.

The body of the female floated up beside Ckx and he turned it over idly, only cursorily interested in noting that she was dead. He pushed the body down into the water, and several times again, his brute humor mildly stirred by the way it persisted in bobbing back to the surface. Soon a more prosaic hunger began building in Ckx' stomach and he left the water.

TONEK II's gravity, thirty percent greater than Earth's, plus its turbulent wind and rain storms had shaped its vegetation into low-growing, gnarled configurations. Ckx worked his way uphill through the tangled foliage of big barreled trees until he came to a flat, rocky clearing. Directly ahead of him on the broad grass-spotted ledge stood two figures.

Ckx' primitive mind was only dimly able to rationalize that these creatures were alien, but the unknown is always fearsome, and with Ckx' race fear triggered instinctive, destructive fury. He lunged toward the nearest figure.

THE MAN IN THE PATH of Ckx' charge was the Reverend Archie Green, head of the Economic Realist Church.

His was the computer-oriented, pragmatic religion, directly involved in the world's money and trade marts, and immensely wealthy. It did not concern itself with minor, mundane ills. Its projects encompassed entire



nations.

Or—in the present instance—an entire world.

Archie Green, in his advanced years—as do many men—had grown introspective. Had his life and his work been a success, he wondered. Would he be remembered after he died? As a great man? He could not be certain.

To better insure that certainty Archie sought ardently for an undertaking that would close his career with an exclamation point. He found it when a report flashed across the news channels that one of the outworld probes had found a earthtype planet in the Crow Wing nebula.

For two hundred years a thousand robot probes had sped through space, seeking planets where man might settle. They had found none, until Tonek II.

Teleporting to the probe ship Earth authorities quickly explored the newly discovered world, analyzed its environment, and pronounced it fit for trial colonization. By then Archie Green's efficient organization had made all necessary arrangements for establishing a religious colony.

Two years later, however, the last of the colonists had left their new world; its dense gravity, and the fury of its elements, plus many quite grave inconveniences, had made life there intolerable.

Archie refused to allow his dream to die. Assiduously he read the reports of the returning colonists, seeking possible solutions to the difficulties on Tonek II. An item caught his attention:

*... during the rainy seasons the many islands off the coast become inundated and the semiintelligent maggii who live on the islands and in the sea about them, come in to shore.*

*Probably seeking food. They are invariably met by savage land dwelling animals we have named murks, and slaughtered. We have been unable to discover why. Though the murks are of the same genus as the maggii they are quite obviously lower on the evolutionary scale. They might be analogous to humans and monkeys. The peculiar aspect of the affair is that the maggii offer no resistance to the slaughter, even seem to welcome their murderers. Perhaps they have a lemminglike instinct that . . .*

Archie had a substitute project.

The first step must be to prevent the next slaughter of the intelligent—or at least semi-intelligent—maggii. Later he would have them thoroughly studied. If their intelligence and capabilities proved as great as indicated he would perhaps be able to lead them to a cultural emergence. Success would make him immortal—among the maggii as well as humans.

JOHN BORASH, UPI correspondent, was facing the brush when the murk burst through. He drew his pistol and shot the animal three times. It staggered and made a barking noise in its throat, but managed to reach the Reverend and rake one hooked claw down the side of his head before it fell.

The blow knocked Archie to the ground and he lay unmoving, his eyes wide and wondering, as Borash ran to him. "How bad is it?" he asked. Blood from the wound stained all one side of Archie's great bony face.

Borash squatted on his heels for a closer inspection. "It doesn't appear to be very deep," he decided, "but we'd better get you to the doctor."

Doctor Irv Cady met them at the door of the prefab that served as the

company hospital. Some of the anxiety left his expression as he examined the wound. "Superficial," he said. Then, "Archie, I've told you and told you, you are too old for this sort of thing. Why don't you go back to Earth where you belong?" A network of broken veins in Cady's ruddy cheeks and nose seemed to stand out sharper when he was angry.

Archie smiled wanly. "I'm no older than you."

"That's right. I shouldn't be here on this fool's errand either. I came along only to look after you."

Borash paid little attention to the argument. The two old men had been close friends for many years, and though their differences now were real enough, their crossness was heavily tempered by mutual affection.

A shout from the hillside—where twenty workmen were laying barbed wire across the fifty foot wide trail—interrupted the discourse. "One of 'em's getting through!"

They looked to where a workman pointed. An orange murk already halfway down the trail was busily working its way lower. Where it couldn't crawl through or under, it ripped the wire loose with a berserk fury. It seemed impervious to the barbs on the wire. The workmen were all armed with rifles and one of them shot the murk.

"What's going to happen when they come down by the thousands?" Cady asked Archie. "We could all be killed."

Some change in the down-slanting lines at the corners of Archie's mouth and eyes puzzled Borash for an instant, and brought a strange unease, but he was unable to decide why.

"We can always get to the teleport in the helicopter," Green said. "But we shouldn't have to leave. We'll

soon have plenty of wire across the trail."

"Wire! You saw how much good that did. Be honest and admit you rushed into this thing without proper preparation. How do we even know the maggii are intelligent? We might be risking our lives for a pack of baboons. At least you should have had them thoroughly studied before you got into this mess."

"There wasn't time. The maggii are due in from the sea at any minute. I had to presume that the colonists' judgment was correct. But what harm am I doing if the maggii turn out to be less intelligent than we expected? Am I not still doing God's will if I save an estimated ten thousand of their lives?"

"We won't be able to save them if we die first," Cady growled as they entered the prefab.

After Green returned to his quarters to rest, Cady and Borash went to retrieve the body of the murk Borash had killed.

"How did this fellow get through the wire?" Borash wondered aloud as he and Cady boosted the dead animal onto the operating table.

"It must have been a stray, down here before we shut off the trail."

"I suppose so."

"I dissected a maggii the day before you arrived." Cady took a scalpel and pushed its blade through the skin of the murk, just above the groin. A pocket of air escaped softly around the blade. "I suspect this one's physiology will be much the same. Except that the maggii had a distinct body scent that was quite pleasant."

Wrapping his left hand around his right Cady forced the scalpel up until the blade stopped against the tough material of the chest. "The same torso barrel of ribbed cartilage", Cady con-

firmed his earlier conjecture. "The hollow bones technically aren't bone either, but hardened cartilage."

He spread the incision wide and held it open with weighted clamps. With a smaller scalpel he opened a large sac inside the body cavity. "The stomach".

"Oh, oh." Cady pointed with his scalpel. "See that ragged strip of membrane hanging from the stomach wall? The maggii had that too, except that it was intact, and filled with eggs. There's been considerable damage here. I wonder . . ." He drew fluid from the stomach with a syringe and deposited it on a strip of litmus paper. "As I suspected. Acid."

He opened the merk's mouth and examined it. "There were pockets of acid in the maggii's gum walls. There are none here, despite the acid traces in the stomach."

"Do you suppose this one had eggs there too, originally?" Borash asked.

"That could be. The maggii had thousands. Which means they have a high mortality rate. And the eggs were soft shelled. Probably meant to be laid in water. If this is a female she might have just laid hers. Though I wonder about the acid. Perhaps I'd better send a report of this to the Med Institute. The computer there should be able to make something of it."

There was a knock on the door and two workmen entered. "We brought down the body of the murk we killed," one said. "Did you want to examine it?"

"No, I guess not. We shouldn't need . . . Just a minute," Cady changed his mind. "Bring it in."

"This one may not have laid its eggs yet," he explained to Borash.

They were disappointed. There were no eggs in the second murk's

membrane sac. Only a three inch white worm, that wriggled frantically in a thick milky fluid as it was exposed.

"Well, I'll be . . ." Cady commented.

THE REVEREND GREEN reappeared at the communications prefab two hours later. A short nap had restored his resilient energy.

"We'll need more barbed wire and rifles." Green sat on the edge of the desk where Borash was typing out a report to his agency. "Will you order them, John, as soon as you finish there? And be certain they send plenty of ammunition."

Borash nodded. "How about spotlights? In case the murks try to get through during the night."

"A good idea. Order them also." Green paused and after a moment said, "I would like another look at those maggii. Care to take a trip to the seashore with me?"

"I'd like to. I haven't had a chance to see them yet, you know."

"There should be a goodly number down there by this time. We'll take the copter."

On the way to the landing strip Green took off his jacket and looked up to where the miniature white sun hung like a hot pearl in the sky. "Yesterday we were freezing," he complained.

TEN OR FIFTEEN maggii loitered or swam by the beach where the men landed. They evidenced no fear of their visitors. One came out of the water and walked to within a few feet of where the men stood.

Seen from a distance of fifty feet it might have been a beautiful Earth woman, wearing a pink dress. On closer inspection the impression van-

ished. Its eyes were set lower on the face, paralleling the flared nostrils. The mouth was sucker shaped. There was more apparent body fat than on the murks, with the orange coloring evident only on the crown of the head and in the arm sockets. In the moist palpitant heat of the afternoon it exuded a scent of spice and saltpeter.

Though an elevated cartilage structure of the chest had at first given the appearance of breasts, the animal was in no way mammalian. Even what had earlier appeared as hair could be seen now as fine fleshy cilia.

THEY LEFT the magii and coptered along the shoreline. Green studied a crude map. "A couple hundred miles down the coast is a bay where the colonists found an edible, native tadpole. It was considered quite a delicacy. We might pick up some."

As they flew south the maggii became more numerous, all of them swimming against the sea current, in the direction of the rendezvous beach the copter had just left. Occasionally they spotted the bodies of dead maggii, floating south with the current. Once they dipped low to study a frisking maggii colored in a patchwork of orange and pink. As though it were a cross between a murk and a maggii.

They found the tadpoles fifty miles farther down the coast than they had estimated. They had little trouble capturing the fishy creatures, being able to scoop them in with their hands. However, they did not stay long. The entire area was pervaded with a stench of decay. They soon discovered the source: The decomposed bodies of dead maggii, thickly permeated by small spidery insects.

ON THE RETURN JOURNEY they had to buck a spasmodic head wind, and ar-

rived later than they had planned. Darkness came with typical Tonek abruptness just as they were about to land. Green was piloting the copter and was caught unprepared for the sudden loss of visibility. He switched on the landing lights just as a finger of jagged rock ripped a long tear up the side of the copter and shattered the rotor. Neither man was hurt, but the flyer was ruined.

"Will you put in a rush order for a new copter, John?" Green asked as they alighted. He was taking the near disaster calmly enough.

On the ledge they learned that the murk attacks had been steadily increasing since they'd left. Floodlights had been set up and Borash could see a hundred murk bodies tangled in the barbed wire. From the darkness of the brush above came the glint of innumerable beast eyes.

The workmen had left the hillside and collected on the clearing, all of them very tired and in an ugly mood. By now the wind had risen and was making a steady singing on the prefab corners.

Cady, who had witnessed the copter crash, came to meet them. "There must be hundreds of the beasts up there." He had to raise his voice to make himself heard. "We'll never be able to get through. And without the copter we're as good as dead." His nerves were balanced on a thin edge.

Borash glanced at Green, who was making no attempt to reassure his friend. Green's peculiar expression, that had puzzled Borash earlier, had returned. And this time he recognized what had disturbed him: He saw now the evidence of a remote breakage of character in the old man, a strength impaired by approaching senility. Not quite concealing it was a small sly smile at the corner of the

lips, as though Green harbored a secret, known to himself alone. And abruptly Borash had the answer:

Archie was hoping to die here!

With his latest project gravely in doubt Green was actively seeking martyrdom. And apparently he was willing to allow the others to die with him. Cady, Borash saw, was unaware of the change in his companion.

Mentally Borash shook off a kind of loneliness that had moved over him. "I'm on my way to order a new copter now," he told Cady. "They should have it up here, and assembled, before the night is over." He went on to the communications building.

Borash found a reply to Cady's earlier dispatch waiting on his desk. MED COMPUTER HYPOTHESIS: (TENTATIVE AND INCOMPLETE) ANIMALS ARE OF SAME SPECIES. MURKS—MALE; MAGGII—FEMALE. IN MATING MALE DRAWS ACID FROM FEMALE MOUTH SACS INTO OWN STOMACH. ACID QUICKLY DETERIORATES WALL OF PSEUDO OVARY. WHITE WORM—WHICH FEEDS ON GLAND SECRETION CONTAINING MALE SPERM—IS IN TURN DRAWN INTO STOMACH OF FEMALE, AND FERTILIZES HER EGGS.

MORE INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR COMPLETION OF HYPOTHESIS.

Borash ordered their new copter and afterward sent Med Labs a report on their trip to the seashore.

The next hour was quiet. There were no further attacks from the murks, and the tadpole meat proved delicious. The workmen's flagging spirits revived slightly. Many of them dozed by the fireside after their meal, though most stayed alert, with their rifles by their sides.

Gradually Borash became aware of what might be described as a loud hum, coming from the upper trail. He

climbed to his feet. In the glare of the spotlights covering the hill area he could see murks, crowded almost shoulder to shoulder, coming from the brush toward them. There were literally thousands.

Borash at that instant had the shocking realization that within a few minutes every human here would probably be dead. He spun around to observe the others. All about them hung a heavy stillness. A stillness not of calm, but the frozen interval just preceding panic.

"All right!" Borash was pleased to note that his voice came out strong and self controlled. "Everybody! Over by the prefabs. Quickly. And bring your rifles.

"You five men," Borash continued his directing, "Up on the ledge by the spotlights. The rest of you, hold your fire, unless they turn this way." By the time the murks reached the barbed wire every man was stationed to Borash's satisfaction.

The murks slowed only briefly at the wire. Much of the work had been undone by earlier-arriving animals, and those that came now either climbed over the bodies stretched on the wire or broke through it with the sheer weight of numbers.

They paid no attention to the Earth company. All their concentration was on the path to the distant seashore. Within twenty minutes the men on the ledge were alone.

"Take with you anything you consider valuable, and that you can carry," Borash resumed command. "But don't waste time. Get to the teleport fast." He left them and hurried to his quarters.

Green was waiting inside, with a slip of paper in his hand. "From the Med Labs." Green said.

Borash took the paper and read:

LATEST REPORT COMPUTER EVALUATED. COMPLETED HYPOTHESIS: MALES—NURKS—UNDERGO PROGRESSIVE SEX CHANGE FOLLOWING MATING, IN TIME BECOMING FEMALES—OR MAGGII, AS YOU CALL THEM. AFTER COMPLETION OF SEX TRANSFORMATION THEY RETURN TO SEA, UNTIL THEIR TIME TO BREED WITH MALES. THEY DIE IN THE MATING PROCESS, AND DRIFT SOUTH, WHILE FERTILIZED EGGS INSIDE BODIES HATCH INTO SPIDER TYPE YOUNG. SPIDERS FEED ON FEMALES' TISSUES. IN TIME SPIDERS UNDERGO METAMORPHOSIS, BECOMING TADPOLES. A SECOND METAMORPHOSIS CHANGES TADPOLES INTO YOUNG MURKS. THEY GROW TO ADULthood, AND RETURN TO BEACHES TO BREED. LIFE CYCLE COMPLETED.

Green's throat has made retching motions at the mention of the tadpoles, but with an obvious effort he recovered his composure. "I will not be leaving with you," he said.

He held up his hand as Borash tried to speak. "None of this changes anything. I came here to give aid to a species of God's creatures undergoing an intellectual emergence. I still intend to carry on. Alone, if necessary."

GREEN MIGHT BELIEVE what he was saying, or it might be only a maneuver—to achieve his martyrdom

wish. Either way Borash had to do what he could to save the Reverend. He thought for a moment but could come up with only one possible solution. Sitting at the communicator he typed: ARE EITHER MURKS OR MAGGII INTELLIGENT? URGENT.

There would be several minutes wait. Borash glanced out a window facing on the clearing. No one was in sight, murk or human. The wind had let up, but it was raining again. He eased himself into a desk chair and lit a cigar. Green poured a cup of coffee from the pot on a small burner.

A quarter inch of ash had gathered on Borash's cigar when the communicator whirled softly.

Borash grabbed the message and read: MURK—MAGGII REPRODUCTION PATTERN TYPICAL OF SEA LIFE: A THOUSAND—OR A MILLION—EGGS FOR ONE SURVIVING ADULT. SURVIVAL THROUGH HIGH OFFSPRING PRODUCTIVITY PRECLUDES INSTRUCTION OF YOUNG, PROGENY MUST THEREFORE BE PREPROGRAMMED, BIOLOGICALLY. GENETIC INSTINCT CONTROLS PREVAIL, WITH MINIMUM INTELLECTUAL PROGRESS.

MURK—MAGGII CANNOT BE INTELLIGENT.

The Reverend Archie Green left Tonek II without further protest.

—CHARLES V. DE VET

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Nobody Leaves New Pitts. (Cont. from page 35)

and he wondered briefly how they told this man-grave from the ones they dug for corpses. Then he realized; they didn't.

He stayed a long time. It was, after all, his first visit.

Finally he turned and headed back towards the town, and the depot. He

had corpses to pick up, a ship to catch, a world waiting. They buried his father here. But not him. Not him. He was the one that got away.

Sykes the corpse handler thought on that, and smiled, on the long walk back to his deadmen.

—GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

*Drusilla Campbell's first published story was "Piper, What Song?" (June, 1974), a story of uncommon depth and emotional power. This is her second.*

# **DREAM OF TRUMPETERS**

## **DRUSILLA NEWLON CAMPBELL**

**Illustrated by Steve Fabian**

**A** GOLD WATCH. A gold watch and a piece of parchment imprinted in an ancient tongue: "To Darca Al-Jenner, in appreciation of fifty years faithful service in the field: 'Humanizing the Galaxy'." The signature is that of Las Von Van Veeder, 322nd Geneen, Intragalactic Communications.

A gold watch, some words I can barely read, and memories of fifty years as Field Researcher for the largest corporation in the traveled universe. Not much to show for it all; somehow I think it all meant more to my father and grandfathers and the dozens of others in my family who made IGC their life. I recall how I felt when, aged fourteen, nervous and pimply, I entered the academy—bright with the naive optimism of the young and the messianic drive to "humanize the galaxy." I had received a call as compelling as any religious; and, indeed, the years working with Krissa were good years. She was a first rate researcher: rational, careful, diligent, certainly a fine balance for my romanticism; and together we did some good things. Thanks to us, millions of Galactic tourists may visit the Daedalus Ice Sculptures, and the musical grottoes of Columba where the wind sighs endless melodies. Because of Krissa and me, Electra 475

will remain as it was the day we first bottomed down on her, a planet of such incredible visual beauty that it tore a gasp from me that left a pain. And thanks to us, Hera has produced more high grade copper than was ever dreamed possible.

But Hera.

May I permit myself to remember?

We bottomed down in a carmine sea: delicate red flowers on slender grasslike stalks surrounded us, whining as a bit of breeze stirred them, swaying. Beyond the waves rose low hills coloured with brilliant wildflowers. The sky was blue.

"Well," said Krissa, hands on ample hips and gazing around her, "Not quite Electra, but almost. Almost. Amazing coloration some of these dead beyond places have." She hoisted her pack and began hiking toward the nearest rise. Turning back to me—she was my senior by one degree—she called, "I'll scout a campsite. You follow my trail with the vehicle."

Krissa preferred walking. She thought researchers who traveled everywhere in All Surface Vehicles made superficial judgments of the creatures and things they encountered. In the early years, I had tried to keep her from walking off alone,

but subsequent experiences had made it abundantly clear that Krissa and her stunner were equal to almost anything that might cross their path. Even without a weapon, my partner was formidable. Over six feet tall, her huge lyrate torso rested on short heavy legs. She gave one the impression that her ability to move was some accident of nature, that she belonged rooted firmly in one spot like some humanoid tree. Amidst the delicate flora of Hera, Krissa appeared ludicrous.

We had been on the planet nearly four months. As observers, our task was simply to keep our eyes open and feed all that we found into the IGC data bank. We sought the unusual, the irreplaceable, the miracles of creation. At the end of our tour Krissa would recommend for either preservation or exploitation. In the early days of intra-galactic travel and exploitation, decision to exploit or preserve had been given by a computer. Only after several errors did the Company accept the fact that there are things of value which do not compute. For the past one hundred and fifty years the ultimate decision had been in the hands of trained and seasoned Field Researchers like Kriss and me.

Thus far Hera had proved copper-rich but otherwise uninteresting. Visually, it was superior to most planets, but in other ways it was insignificant: no fabulous animals or plants, no puzzling antiquities, no singing caves or ice sculpture. Krissa and I had already begun to talk about what we might find on our next planet. That was, of course, the chief delight of being a Field Researcher; each planet began as a place of infinite promise, and we found our curiosity and enthusiasm for observation reawakened with every new assignment.



As I assembled the vehicle, a movement in the surrounding red caught my eye. I was wary, but for several long moments I saw nothing more and then—there it was!—a movement in harmony with the swaying grass and yet clearly differing from it. Experience had taught me that there is little to fear in the Galaxy. There is much that is hard to understand, some that is incomprehensible; but conscious malevolence is an oddity—a find so unusual as to be a real coup for an ambitious Field Researcher. My stunner was at my hip. I removed the weapon from its holster and flipped the switch to its widest arc, providing myself with the greatest amount of protection. I continued to assemble the vehicle. I never lost the feeling that I was being observed from within the wall of grass; yet nothing happened. I was able to load the vehicle and, hovering a few feet off the ground, follow Krissa's trail to a grove of flowering trees. Here the landscape reminded me of Earth, my home. When I told Krissa, she laughed.

"Oh, you Earthians; you judge all planets as either more or less like home. Al-Jenner, Earth is indeed the opal of the universe, but must you endlessly compare to her? Now Severn, where I was born, is so water-logged that one wonders why it was colonized in the first place. It bears not the slightest resemblance to any other world we've visited."

"I'll take a side trip to Severn one of these days, and even there, Krissa, I will find something of home." It was an old argument entitled variously: "The Incomparable Severn," "Earth As Everything," and "Is Nothing Unique?"

"Don't waste your time, Al-Jenner; I haven't been back since I left IGC

Academy in Brussels, and I don't imagine I ever will. Amazing place. Unlike any other we've seen. A watery wasteland."

Working as a team for thirty years is like being married. There was little I hadn't heard before in one form or another. Through youth and middle age we had debated, amused and bored one another; and the memories of her life had drifted in and mingled with my own. Many partners in the service establish sexual relationships. Ours had remained platonic over the years, however, for as a lover Krissa was not attractive to me; and if I thought of it, I assumed she found me equally uninspiring. We never discussed sexual matters, but I supposed that she, like I, enjoyed sex only on leave and between assignments, that it was not a significant part of her life. But, honestly, such things rarely occurred to me. Much more frequently I thanked my good fortune for Krissa's skill and companionship. She was a good friend and a fine partner.

As we ate, I told her about the forms in the grass. She was only mildly interested.

"Just our luck to discover life after four months of nothing. Let's hope it's primitive."

"I had the sensation of intelligence; a good deal of intelligence."

"Shape?"

"Nothing. That was the peculiar part of it. I knew a thinking creature—a group of them, in fact—was observing me. I could see them, but I couldn't, if that makes any sense."

"It doesn't, but first impressions rarely do in the Dead Beyond," she moved around the camp, discovering chores where I could see none. It was typical of Krissa that she continued to work as she spoke, wasting no time,

both brain and body labouring. "The surveyors found no indication of civilized life on Hera, Al-Jenner; as you know, they're rarely wrong."

I tried again to explain what I'd seen, but Krissa was unimpressed.

"You are a romantic."

"True. But I trust this: there's something on Hera with us."

"Well, I'll keep an open mind; you're sometimes more sensitive than I. But it's been a long time between leaves, my friend; and four months on Hera seems like four months too many."

"Which means?"

"Only that our reliability as observers decreases as assignments lengthen."

"You think this is all some day dream, do you?"

Laughter, a little condescending. "Beware of paranoia, Al-Jenner."

**NIGHT ON HERA.** A stillness too large for men from the civilized universe. The air, full of nothing, hung heavy, wet with silence. I lay listening to the emptiness of the Heran night; and after what seemed like hours, I rose and walked out under the sky's black canopy. Long ago men looked at the stars and felt their human insignificance, but thanks to the Company, the pricks of light have become compass points on a voyage that may never end. Like others of my century, I am comforted by starlight.

But Krissa called that part of the Galaxy the Dead Beyond, and never was the name more apt than on that sleepless night; for there, on the fringes of the Milky Way, there were few stars and Hera had no moon. The planet's night would have been black as the pits of space were it not for some peculiarity of the Heran soil. A faintly green glow haloed the earth-

body of Hera, making it possible to walk and see at night. Without the glow, I would have found the Heran night unbearable.

I was sleepless. I was tense. I began walking and had gone some distance through the night before I realized that I'd forgotten my stunner. In academy we were so trained that to move without protection was contrary to survival instincts, and for a moment I was alarmed at having acted irrationally. The glow of the Heran night was seductive, however; my alarm faded and rather than return to camp, I wandered still further away to a high place where I could see the carmine flowers, their colour purple in the night glow, I sat finally, and observed the landscape below me.

For a while I dozed. All at once, however, I was brought sharply awake. Below me, in the grass, I observed shapes: tall, with the natural grace of willows, they appeared to have four appendages or perhaps five, but I was unable to distinguish much as they moved among the long stems, their bodies duplicating the waving motion created by the wind in the grass. With great excitement, I felt the rhythm of consciousness was everywhere around me, caressing my senses and stilling my curious nature. I was a sleepless observer throughout the night, and when I returned to camp at dawn, Krissa had not yet arisen. I moved around the camp quietly, preparing food for both of us. I considered letting her sleep beyond breakfast, extending my peaceful solitude; but I had been well trained, and years in the field helped me overcome my desire to be alone. I resolved to say nothing of what I had seen. I still felt the sting of Krissa's condescension. Food ready, I

awakened my colleague, and we broke our fast together in the solemn dawn.

**K**RISS, BY REMOTE RADIO: "Al-Jenner, quickly! Bring the cameras!"

On the remote equipment I saw my first Herans. A small group was assembled in a meadow. They resembled humans incredibly—like none others that I knew in the Universe—and my mind flashed through the possibilities: Ancient space travelers from Earth? A seed of fate, carried to this remote planet by the cosmic winds? They were human! We'd discovered humans in the dead reaches of the Galaxy! There are no words to describe the exultation of my spirit.

Later, protected behind an outcropping of boulders, I played my camera over the naked bodies of the Herans, and with the telescopic lens, I examined and filmed their private parts. They appeared to be sexually identical, as if there was no male or female differentiation. There was likewise little to choose between the body types: all were lithe and fawn-like as they moved about the meadow. There were no children and there was no sound.

"Why are they so silent?" whispered Krissa close to my ear. "Why don't they speak or something? The silence is quite uncanny."

"Perhaps they don't make sounds."

"Unlikely—all advanced forms have communication."

"But why speech? They may communicate in some other way."

"You think they're telepaths, I suppose?"

"Why not?"

"Al-Jenner, from the beginning IGC has been after telepaths. You know as well as I that if they haven't been found after hundreds of years of exploration, it's unlikely that they exist at

all."

"It's always the last place, Krissa."

"If we're going to find telepaths, my clever friend, we both know they won't look like this."

And I had to admit that she was right, of course. Theorists over the past hundred years had been certain of one thing: highly developed telepaths would certainly have immense cranial development. The Herans were unique in the Galaxy, perhaps; but they could not be telepaths.

Regardless of my disappointment, my fascination did not wane. My camera continued to record them minutely. Skin the colour of apricots, delicately tawny. Hair always long and glossy, coloured like clay. Their features were not beautiful. Their eyes were too large as were their noses, the mouths ludicrously tiny, almost pinched; but as I watched their grazing—I could see them pulling tender young shoots from the meadow grass, sucking the delicate stalks into their small mouths—I came more and more to see in them a haunting beauty. It was an aura, a way they had about them, that had nothing to do with the particulars of their appearance.

During the days that followed, Krissa and I unsuccessfully sought for any signs of Heran habitation. Only when we observed the Herans standing together in the rain, arms outstretched, fingertips touching and bodies swaying in that windy way they had, did we realize that they built no homes and had no villages but lived wild.

Krissa was disgusted. "Not too flattering, Al-Jenner, but I think our would-be humans are just a herd. They must have astounding physical endurance to live that way. Maybe the Medics would like to take a look

at them."

I had a sudden technicolor image of blood and creatures that screamed without sound as the doctors cut them up.

"They're humans, Krissa; the only other humans in the Galaxy. It'd be like fratricide to extinguish them."

"They appear human only superficially. All told, the differences outnumber the similarities. There's something distinctly alien about them despite their appropriate arms and legs." Krissa was speaking in her terribly scholarly voice, her scientist's voice; it was a wall of sound to hide behind. She had decided. "We've been here long enough for them to make some effort at communication, but they've totally ignored us. The fact that they appear human in some ways is, I think, merely a chemobiological fluke."

"What will it take to convince you otherwise?"

"Any number of things, Al-Jenner. You know that I'm always fair in these things. If they speak or if we find some sign of habitation, if they make contact with us in some way, I'll certainly reassess my opinion; but until that happens I'm going to consider them as alien beasts, and not very interesting ones at that."

"But, we know nothing about them . . ."

"A primitive life form, antelope with two feet. They build no villages—not even simple lean-tos. They plant no crops and they are unable to communicate on even the most rudimentary level." Here I started to interrupt her, but she anticipated my comment and continued, "Al-Jenner, telepaths would be the most highly developed of all humans; in a sense they would be our evolutionary betters. Do you seriously wish me to

consider that where these creatures are involved? Do you see any signs of brilliance? They are simple herd creatures." she laughed. "IGC will be pleased. Two preservations in the last three trips hasn't made us terribly popular with the bosses."

"You don't mean that you're ready to finish the report? Already?"

"What do you expect to find if we spend more time?"

"I don't know Krissa," I replied emphatically, "but my instincts tell me that there's something big here. Something bigger than anything we've encountered before."

"What nonsense, Al-Jenner; it's only because they look like us a little. You've convinced yourself that they're telepaths . . . don't bother to deny it, I know it because I know you. But how could they be; think of their eyes."

"Totally blank," I admitted.

"That's right," she leaped upon my agreement, "Not the slightest glimmer of anything. Absolutely blank. Al-Jenner, if there were anything inside those things worth knowing about, it'd show in the eyes."

"Unless they're so different that eyes aren't important as they are for us. Couldn't they be something really new? Couldn't they be something so far outside our experience that we . . ."

"Al-Jenner, if you had your way, everything in the Universe would be preserved and IGC and the whole civilized Galaxy would go down in financial ruin. The surveyors have found enough copper on this planet to pave the streets of earth. Do you want the Company to turn its back on that—on the jobs, the prosperity—to save a mediocre life form you'd euthanize if it were born on earth?" Krissa grinned and it occurred to me

that nothing pleased her as much as her own feeling of superiority. "Sometimes you're almost traitorous, my dear."

Sighing, I said, "There are days when I feel that way. I'm ashamed to admit it, even to you; but there are times when I doubt the wisdom of the Company."

"But it has nothing to do with the Company, Al-Jenner," she cried enthusiastically, "Remember your lessons, Man! It's far more basic than simply the Company pro or con."

She began then to quote me chapter and verse of Academy textbooks. Words and phrases I had learned as a young man in Brussels came back to me.

"Extinction is part of the order of things; it's the polarity which energizes the Universe: extinction and preservation. We preserve what is best in the Galaxy. Preservers, Al-Jenner, in a very real way that makes us life-givers."

"But Krissa, don't you think there've been mistakes?"

"Well, of course, there are always mistakes, but they were hundreds of years, before the Company had matured. And of course, before there was a Company as we know it today. As a matter of fact, I can give you an example. For some reason it's stayed with me since I was a school girl on Severn. You may know this story, Al-Jenner; it happened on the inestimable Earth you're always raving about."

"There have been a lot of mistakes on Earth; I'm chary of spreading the disease."

"Do you know the Trumpeter Swan?"

I shook my head.

"There was a book in one of those sealed cases; it always remained open to the same page. For years I would

go through the museum and see the same page and the same picture. A guide translated the caption under the picture for me: Trumpeter Swan. They were large birds that lived on Earth hundreds of years ago; they didn't survive the Twentieth Century. We've seen nothing like them in all of our travels together, Al-Jenner; but if we did, I guarantee we'd preserve them." She smiled at me, her fond smile. "How many trillions of miles do you suppose we've traveled looking for trumpeters and telepaths, my friend? How many years has it been? Thirty by Earth calculation? A little more?" she laughed and patted my hand. "Two ancient neuters sailing the sky in search of the impossible."

"And arguing as we did in the beginning . . ."

"Almost a third of a century ago."

"And you've won almost every argument," I reminded her.

"True, but there were times when you were right, when you forced me to appreciate the incomprehensible."

I leaned forward, speaking with an intensity that astonished me, "Let now be one of those times. Delay your report for a day or two. Don't let's assign these creatures to the First Crew without giving them a chance."

For a dreadful moment as I said it, I imagined the IGC First Crew moving in. Eventually Hera would give up her riches to diligent pioneer families and thoughtful loners, men and women who would build towns with schools and museums. The carmine coloured flowers would find their way into manicured front gardens and bowls cut from Martian crystal. The graceful Herans themselves would be remembered in mythic terms, surviving in children's stories and tales told late at night

around dimming campfires. But before all that, the First Crew would come: social and moral derelicts, they were the men and women who would establish man's first outposts, the mines and space ports, on Hera. In the name of the Company they would exploit the planet and its inhabitants as they wished. The 287th Geneen had put it well: "The role of Intra Galactic Communications is greater than the fortunes of one planet, is greater than the desire and quest for profit. The Company is the civilizer of the Universe, and under its auspices everyone is given a task in the great plan for humanizing the Galaxy." There was a place for the murderers, the rapists and the sadists so long as they were also miners and pilots and civil engineers.

I was profoundly disturbed by my thoughts. I believed that Krissa and I had stumbled upon something perhaps more important than the humanizing of the Galaxy, but alone I could not prevent the Company developing Hera. She and her mysteries would go the way of a hundred other planets, fat to the corporate belly.

Why was I not resigned?

**I**N THE EVENING, I walked one final time on Hera.

Krissa had given the planet a thirty-two hour reprieve: one day. By dawnlight she would send her report in favor of exploitation. I did not believe that in those last hours I would find anything which might prove my contention that Hera and the Herans were of Galactic importance. I walked on Hera, hoping to experience the hard sweet stillness which had enchanted me before. I might come upon a herd of the silent grazers and watch them, imprinting their grace and dignity forever within the folds of

my memory.

I found a resting place across the river, against a stout broadleaved tree. From where I sat I could see the meadow, part of the field of red flowers, and the river.

The landscape was awash with the lambent green glow, appearing dreamlike, bewitching to the eyes. It was gradually and totally without surprise, with a kind of ever-growing, lazy joy that I became aware of my companion. A solitary Heran had slipped from the trees and stood at my left shoulder. I rose, unbidden, and when the Heran put out its hand, I extended my own without fear or question. For an instant, then, I panicked; but the handclasp of the Heran compelled me forward, and as the woods darkened around us, I felt myself suddenly calm and unafraid.

Within the wood, we came to a hidden lake whose waters were astonishingly clear. In the night glow, I was able to see the rippled sandy bottom stretching beyond my vision like a desert horizon. As the Heran led me into the water, it didn't occur to me that I might object. It seemed that a part of me understood what was happening and the rest had suspended judgment, willingly. Beside me, the Heran was beautiful, moving and mingling with the water, the luminous night painting shadows on its body.

I faced my companion and, with fingertips touching we began moving in the water, a slow aquatic dance that enveloped me in a sense of antiquity and limitless patience. Though the Heran and I were alone, I sensed around me the others of Hera, touching me with feathery fingers, gentling me with their immense spaniel eyes no longer blank. I felt my spirit stir as the first-exploratory tendrils of my

senses entwined with water, trees, and Heran. In a surge of exquisite joy, I felt the biology of the planet.

I understood.

I was standing on the bank when it was over; the spot where I had stood before. I recognized the place because of the peculiar symmetry of the wildflowers—the way each of the eleven petals split at its tip into a spray of delicate . . . “Great Geeneen,” I thought, “I must be mad.” I wasn’t a man to memorize wildflowers. I was a trained observer, true, able to judge the worth of things. But never wildflowers. And then I remembered.

WHEN I BROUGHT Krissa to the lake at dawn, alternations of light and dark played on the surface like bits of mosaic.

She ridiculed me.

“What shall I believe, Al-Jenner? That you found this lake? Alright. I believe that. But I do not for one moment give the slightest credence to the rest of your story, I’m afraid. Last night after I delayed sending my report, I decided to run a computer check. I despised doing it, as you know. It’s like an admission of defeat when one’s supervisors are checking the logs. With our experience, we shouldn’t need the computer; we should just *know* when something is important enough to preserve. But you were so adamant in your defense of the Herans that I wanted to guard against any chance of my being in error.”

“And the results?” Why did I ask? I believe I already knew the answer.

“From what we know about these creatures, the chances of their being worth preserving is several million to one, and the odds against their being telepaths are simply astronomical.

The computer recommended that a pair be sent to the research farm on Earth and that’s all. The rest aren’t worth preserving.” Krissa paused and then said, not unkindly, weighing her words carefully. “I think that we must conclude, Al-Jenner, that last night’s experience was an hallucination of some sort. You’re attracted to these creatures, have been from the beginning; and perhaps you have become somewhat obsessed with them. Wandering out here last night, you found this lake, your mind began to wander and you . . . well, how else can I put it, Al-Jenner? You fantasized. You probably couldn’t bear to recognize such a scientific lapse in yourself, and so your mind invented this story to protect itself. I’m certain there was nothing calculated in it, but you must admit that it’s all very pat . . . a perfect sexual allegory.” Pause. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of here.” She blurted out a short, uncharacteristic laugh. “I’m surprised it wasn’t me, truly.” She rolled her eyes suddenly, and I saw at once how much she needed to believe her own theory. In that one moment I also knew the damnation of the Herans would not be stopped; even had the night experience been Krissa’s, she would not have permitted herself the luxury of believing it. “Oh, Al-Jenner, if you could imagine my sexual fantasies, you’d wonder that I haven’t been pleasuring myself among the natives.” Now her laughter hinted at hysteria. “I like that phrase, ‘pleasuring myself among the natives.’ It has a nice archaic ring to it.”

She would never believe me. She had accepted her explanation of my experience to rationalize her own guilty fantasies. It was strange that Krissa had never struck me as a person to suffer from guilt, but then one

never knows. Her talk continued, but I had stopped listening. It was of no interest to me now. I drifted back into the warm wash of my memory, remembering the sensation of touching, and being touched by all the corners of the Universe. I recalled the movement of the planets, the rush of wind from space. I remembered dancing in the eye of time.

And so, the report was sent and we broke camp. In the weeks that followed, how many times did I tell my story in hope of saving the Herans? First to Krissa—endlessly to her—and then to our supervisors. Then to a committee and finally to a doctor. Perhaps the doctor believed me; at any rate, the Company was lenient. They gave me six months leave on Diana and then returned me to Krissa. For another twenty years she and I inspected and evaluated the magic of the Galaxy, growing older and harder to please until finally we were of no use to the Company. We found no telepaths, and last year a professor of Astro-Galactic Biology explained why, after all, telepaths are an evolutionary impossibility. The Herans were slaughtered within the first year of their planet's exploitation, and the two on Earth died of a respiratory disease before they could be studied.

I kept the peace with Krissa and my job: conscientious if not inspired. I do not think of the Herans anymore. But sometimes at night, I dream of Trumpeters.

—DRUSILLA NEWLON CAMPBELL

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*Fred Saberhagen's Berserker stories were a fixture in Galaxy magazine over the last decade; now he makes his debut in this magazine with a short and surprisingly pointed story about perspectives and what is meant by a word like—*

# WILDERNESS

## FRED SABERHAGEN

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

THE YOUNG WOMAN had her blond hair in neat long braids, and the little girl, five or six years old, had her hair done in shorter versions of the same. The woman and girl were in the creek with a cake of soap when they first heard the crashing noise. It sounded from the direction of the distant road, like the noise that a clumsy man or a big startled animal would make moving in the brush. The woman immediately got out of the water with her child, the two of them wearing flecks of soap and goosebumps. Even now in summer the stream was icy, this close to its mountain source.

As the sound grew steadily louder the woman turned an anxious look toward the fine thread of white smoke rising from one of the two teepees in the adjacent clearing. Alders and young evergreens formed a heavy screen around the clearing, but if it were a man who made that crashing he could not fail to see the smoke and wonder who had made the fire. No other human work would be visible to him in any direction, except the fine contrail of a jet moving close above the lowering sun.

Bold and methodical, the sounds in the brush came nearer. The woman kept looking at the wall of brush across the creek, in the direction of

the sounds, meanwhile dressing herself rapidly in a single garment, that might once have been a man's military surplus coverall. It was shapeless and faded but not noticeably dirty. From time to time she made shushing sounds and gestures at her little girl, and as soon as she had covered herself she quickly dressed the child in jeans and faded sweatshirt. The girl's short, light braids came snapping through when the shirt was pulled over her head. Then on the opposite bank of the stream, near the crossing of rough stones, the sounds at last produced their maker.

He had a square tanned face not shaved for a day, with close-cut graying brown hair above it, and he looked to be in his early forties. The strong body swayed, drunk or stoned on something fierce, but then that face looked entirely too straight, too pillar-or-the-community, to sway with anything but alcohol. He was well-enough dressed, in slacks and sport shirt and light jacket that had no doubt been clean at the beginning of the day. Stuffed inside his half-zipped jacket, and in its pockets, there rode a lumpy cargo dully jangling with his movements. It must be beer cans he was carrying so, for in each big hand he held one more of them, empty,

the golden circles of their ends marked with dark keyholes where their pulltabs had been taken.

There was nothing in his face to frighten the woman. He was startled and pleased to discover the woman and child and looked intently at them, but then his eyes moved quickly on, joyfully taking in the teepees and the planted field—fenced against deer with posts and string and fluttering rags—and the well-worn paths that made crossings of the clearing and loops around it but nowhere went out to the world.

In a slurred bass-baritone he cried out: "People! It's beautiful, there's people! In th' middle of th' bloody wilderness!"

The young woman turned away from him, as if looking for support. It was on the way. Several more people were approaching, gathering together as they progressed from the farther reaches of the large clearing. There were two more brown and barefoot children; another young woman, with her black hair loose and very long, wearing a man's old shirt and jeans; a black man, with uncut hair bushing under a wide-brimmed hat, wearing tattered suit-coat over blue work shirt, nondescript trousers, brogans. The remaining man looked anglo and his long hair fell straight. He had a brown beard, bare feet, tight-shrunk jeans. Under a shawl patterned in zig-zags his upper body was bare. Symbols popular five years earlier, wrought in bright metal, hung from a chain against his chest. The men were both dusty and sweating as if they had just been working in the field.

Approaching and gathering in silence, the people of the clearing looked at their visitor with various shadings of distaste.



He, on the higher bank across the narrow water, was glad to see them all. "Lovely people. I'd offer all you folks a beer, several beers. But y'see all my tanks are empties." He belched gently and laughed gently, and gently shook his jangling jacket.

The man with the shawl turned his back on the sight. But after pulling at his beard in silence for a moment he turned once more to face it.

Not perturbed by unhappy silence, the visitor announced: "My intention was, t' distribute these beer cans throughout the len'th and brea'th of this pristine wilderness. But as its already occupied, by such a sturdy outpost of humanity, I see no need . . . hey, what you've got here is one of those communal things, I bet. I guess you're hippies or grokkies or whatever. I'm not very up t'date on what th' word is now. No offense."

His only answer was in the way that they all looked at him, as if at a disaster already happened and nothing to be done about it.

He said: "I first read about places like this, God it must be twenty years ago, back in the sixties. I was a Boy Scout leader then, I thought tents were a lot of fun." He swayed and dropped a can by accident, and had to catch a branch to save his balance. "Well, tents aren't the worst thing there is, but cities are better. Walls and roofs and more walls and roofs, I like 'em all in neat rows. Noise and garbage. I've come to like noise and garbage."

"If that's your track," the black man said, "it could be you should've stayed on it."

"I had t' visit th' frontier," the visitor said vaguely. Squinting past the people of the clearing, past their canvas teepees, his face for the first time showed unhappiness. "Now there's

your fields. Corn, tomatoes . . ." He let go his branch and came across the creek, surprisingly quick and sure-footed when he concentrated on the uneven stepping-stones. He studied the fields again. "All right. But how d'you work it? No real machines. You just play you're friends with nature, and break your backs. Listen, I grew up on a farm. You need to rent or buy some good machinery, knock down half these goddam trees to make some room, and raise some real crops. And put up houses! Act as if you meant t' stay on and inhabit the planet for a while. But wait a minute." He tried to clear his head with shaking. "Sorry. You're way out here so you can squat on some free land, right? You'll do things right when you get some money in, isn't that it?"

"We're just not doing things right," the shawled man said, in a remote monotone. "We should all get stoned on alcohol and run across the country leaving a trail of . . . garbage. Wait a minute." His eyes sharpened, staring at the visitor, at whom he now leveled a bony forefinger. "I've seen you somep'ce, when I was on a trip to town. I saw you on television, right? Now are you a reporter?"

The blond girl, in a tiny voice that might have belonged to her daughter, put in softly: "I was thinking that I'd seen him, too."

The man did not seem to care whether they had ever seen him or not. "I'm no reporter. I'm just saying—" And with that he abruptly fell silent, looking past the others to the west as if at something deeply disturbing. But when the others turned there was nothing to be noted in the west except the going of the sun. The shadow of a distant mountain was reaching out across the clearing where they stood.

Now the stranger's voice contained a hint of panic. "I'll never make it back before dark." He took a staggering step and almost slid into the creek. "Must be two miles t' where I left my car. Listen, good people, I call for sanctuary for the night. I'll pay you for a place to bunk, inside a tent."

The people of the clearing exchanged troubled glances among themselves. The shawled man told the visitor: "Just wait right where you are, one minute." While the visitor waited the others went to stand in a little knot between the teepees. There the adults conferred.

The black man said: "Can't let him go back right now."

"Why?" the dark girl asked.

"As drunk as he is. Suppose he falls down a ravine, or just gets lost and dies?"

Others nodded with reluctant concern. The shawled man said: "Another point, if he's lost and his car is found near here, then we'll be found too. Swarmed over, investigated. At best we'd have to move."

They all looked at the visitor again. Leaning against a tree where they had left him, he seemed to be yearning after the setting sun.

"Then he can stay the night," the black man said. No one evinced any objection, and together they walked back to their visitor. The black man made the offer: "If you make no trouble you can stay until morning. Leave your garbage in the trash-pit, down that way."

The square-faced man pushed away from his tree with obvious relief. "Thank you, many thanks!" And, a minute later when he had come back from the garbage pit without his beer cans: "I said I'd pay my way. How's forty bucks? That's what a real motel

would cost."

The others felt a common impulse to refuse. But there were always things that needed buying, on the quick trips to town; there was always too little money in the common fund.

"No luggage, so I'll pay in advance. Who'm I paying?"

"Doesn't matter," said the shawled man. Then he reached to take the bills.

Inside the larger teepee everyone sat on canvas groundcloths around the little central fire, which kept out the chill of mountain nightfall, and steamed and bubbled the pots the women hung above it. The stranger had unzipped his jacket. They handed him coffee in a can. The alcohol seemed to be metabolizing out of him, and his hands were shaking just a bit. "Coming home," he said to himself. "Coming home t' find people who want to live like this."

The black man made no pretence of not hearing. "Like I said, go back to the city if that's your track. You going back, first thing in the morning. You ever come to bother us again, and we'll tell your friends you lived with us three days."

The visitor paid no attention. He had his own speech to make. "Listen, you people, don't live like this. None of this crap about loving nature, you have no idea what she is. Oh sure, the green trees are nice, and the little squirrels. But *you* let *them* grow, not the other way round. Keep your nature, your wilderness, in a cage, an' make damn well sure the bars are thick." He filled his lungs with mountain air and wood-smoke tang. "That's fine, good air t' breathe. No one knows better'n me how fine that is. But can we trust nature to give us air? If we were smart we'd put all the good air in a big jar, and let out just a

little at a time, as it was needed."

"What are you so fearful of?" the blond young woman asked. She seemed really worried for him. "There are only a few bits of wilderness, of real nature, left in the world. Are they going to destroy you?"

The man stared at her intently, but did not seem able to comprehend what she had said. "Yeah, keep a few bits of nature in cages," he replied at last. "Keep trees behind big fences, t'show we're strong enough to do so. Otherwise drive the wilderness out, this is our place here, *our place*."

"Our place? You think your forty bucks bought you a share?" The shawled man was getting angry fast. "You didn't put down that much money, mister, to become a partner here. You don't *have* that much."

"Listen, it is our place!" The visitor started a fist-pounding gesture that midway lost itself in weariness. He thought things over briefly, then started up again. "I do have money. Fair amount. I'll finance some things for you. Not that I want to move in, I'll go and never come back. But I want you t' do right with this land."

The shawled man said now: "We didn't ask you in to give a lecture. If you weren't so drunk I'd throw you out."

"Well I'm not drunk, grokkie, not that drunk. I could've found my car. Jus' because it's dark outside doesn't mean I can't . . . be outside. I could go outside right now. The real reason I stayed was to get you people straightened out, make you see where your lives are all wrong." From the square face the words came loudly and righteously; the profaning of the teepee promised to go on and on.

From somewhere the shawled man pulled out the forty dollars in now-crumpled bills, and threw them. "Get

the hell out of my sight. Go over to the other tent and sleep it off."

The visitor's voice stopped, and his square certainty failed. He started slowly to pick up the money, and then he let it lie. He looked round at all the faces, and then jumped up and put his hands to his head and ran outside. The others followed in a rapid straggle, calling out confusedly to him and to one another.

After the firelight, darkness struck the eyes like a blow. Full night, clear and moonless, had come to swallow up the land. The stranger had run out under the stars, then stopped after a few strides, looking up. The others gathered around him, talking at cross-purposes while he paid no heed. Eyes quickly began to become accustomed to the dark.

The black man took the visitor by the arm, and pointed forcefully. "Look there, that's the lights of Oakland in the sky, that glow you see. Now I'm gonna walk you to your car, and then you drive—"

"To hell with Oakland." It was a changed voice, harder and soberer but somehow more remote. His arms that had been half lifted were going down slowly to his sides. His face was still turned up. "I didn't want to be out at night, in the open . . . but it's all right. There's the Dipper, tipped to spill . . . follow the handle south, there's Arcturus. There's Bo-oh-teez, Libra, Virgo. Sirius, that blue-white spike, I thought once that it was coming after me, it's on the other side of the sun this season. Canopus, that we like to lock our sensors on, it's somewhere underfoot, you never see it this far north. Yeah, Mars, there's the pock-marked bastard now, coming on to opposition. I really don't mind looking any more. You can see much from our little place under all the

(cont. on page 120)

# THE AMAZING INTERVIEW:

## FRITZ LEIBER

Conducted by DARRELL SCHWEITZER

*This interview was conducted at the First World Fantasy Convention, Providence, R.I., November 1, 1975.*

AMAZING: You have something of a theatre background, don't you? How has this effected your fantasy writing?

LEIBER: Well it's effected my writing in many ways, and from very early on. You see my father was a Shakespearean actor primarily on the stage, and so when I was just a little kid I was exposed to the plays of Shakespeare. I mean, my father was learning Hamlet when I was four years old. I learned the part pretty well at the time myself. But the main thing is that I was exposed to Shakespeare and to drama. I know that's had a profound effect on my writing. In the first place, I do at times tend to fall into a kind of Shakespearean poetry in my writing. And also I tend to cast stories in a dramatic form. I visualise scenes in my stories as if they were scenes in a play on the stage with entrances and exits, and I tend, as I said, to set my stories as if they were on the stage. Not too many of my stories have been dramatized but I've had a couple on Rod Serling's *Night Gallery*, and of course there's been *Conjure Wife*. I have not written for the stage, or television, or the movies, but I sometimes cast short stories in the form of one-act plays, with the stories consisting of stage directions and spoke dialogue. That's true of, say, "The Secret Songs" and "The Winter Flies" and "237 Talking Statues Etc."

AMAZING: Do you think there's any potential in fantasy theatre?

LEIBER: Yes, I think it's a possibility, and I'd like to see some of it done to my stories. A. J. Budrys pointed out that *The Big Time* just cries out for dramatization because it's done very much as a play, because it holds to the classical unities. It all happens in one place; it takes about two hours of actual story time; and there's a unity of motivation running through it. And as it happens right here at Brown University and out in Berkeley California there are projects on at the present to dramatize *The Big Time* as a stage play.

AMAZING: It seems to me that fantasy has a unique advantage on the stage, because the audience can be induced to imagine so much. Something done on stage, in the round for example, with virtually no props, would be very difficult to do on screen because there you need elaborate special effects. *Peer Gynt* is a good example.

LEIBER: Yes, whether things are done in that simple fashion, or whether there are attempts to use special effects on stage, I think it can be very impressive in both cases. If you do have special effects on stage, why, they have a kind of excitement that the movies and TV never had, because you're pulling out something right in front of the audience, like watching a magician work live. And so I think whether it's done by just letting the audience imagine the special effects, as is the case in theatre in the round, or whether you actually attempt it on stage, the results are always good.

AMAZING: Do you think there would

be an advantage here, because today the theatre audience is more discriminating than the movie audience, and you could actually get intelligent material produced?

LEIBER: Yes, that's true. After all, even the movie audience is becoming more discriminating. The trend is towards small theatres and small audiences, and there isn't so much need for seeking the lowest common denominator audience nowadays on the stage or even in the movies. That's really the function of television.

AMAZING: Have you had any experience writing for the movies?

LEIBER: No, not really. And I've stayed away from it not because I don't want to do it but because I know it's a difficult sort of writing. Of course there are the technical problems and learning those in the medium, but also there is the problem of pleasing the people who are involved, the prospective producers, the ones who will pay for it, and the actors, and in the case of television the network and the sponsor. I've stuck to magazine and book fiction because that is still a one man job.

AMAZING: Why do you write? Is it as a job, or for self expression?

LEIBER: It's for both. Self expression is perhaps too weak a phrase. I write in order to stay sane. It's part of my whole adjustment to life, to be a writer, and look at experience from the point of view of hunting story material. If I couldn't write, I couldn't stay healthy, mentally and emotionally healthy. So, it's something I have to do and I have to do it for a living. I'm just at the age to be entering social security, but instead of having the retirement problem which can be so dreadful for some people, why I have no problem at all. I just gotta go on working, for support and for sanity.

AMAZING: Then you find your writing more of a personal thing, not to be

tampered with by others?

LEIBER: I've gotten a great deal of help, really, from editors. I think John W. Campbell, Jr. certainly helped me a great deal with my first stories, and especially my first two novels, *Conjure Wife* and *Gather Darkness!* I submitted outlines and first chapters to him for those books, and he gave me a great deal of help. In the case of *Gather Darkness!* it was taking the characters more seriously and treating them as if they were real people rather than as satirical figures, which they tended to be when I first started to write the book. And in *Conjure Wife* he helped me keep the plot from getting out of hand. Later on, almost ten years later, I found myself owing a great deal to Anthony Boucher. When I was selling to *Fantasy & Science Fiction* while he was editor he helped me give my stories more literary polish, more of a modern, contemporary treatment. There are several stories like "Rum Titty Titty Tum Ta Te" and "A Deskful of Girls," and "The Big Holiday" which wouldn't have their present form if it hadn't been for the intelligent cooperation of Tony Boucher. When he got my first versions of those stories he made suggestions of a most general sort for rewriting the stories. I'm happy to cooperate with the intelligent editor at any time. My stories have been improved by it. Some of my best titles, for instance, have been given me by editors. I owe a lot to Frederik Pohl there. For instance I had titled my story about chess as "Grand Master." I was thinking in terms of titles that would have appealed to John Campbell. He liked one word titles. And Fred Pohl picked out of the story the phrase, "The Sixty-Four Square Madhouse," and it made a fine title. That was true of "The Creature From The Cleveland Depths," which I had originally called

"The Tickler," and Fred Pohl found this title in my story, and of course it's quite charming.

AMAZING: What were your dealings with August Derleth like?

LEIBER: They were always happy dealings, not always successful. Derleth rejected a number of my stories, oddly enough, that later sold successfully. I remember he turned down "The Man Who Made Friends With Electricity". Although it's quite a popular story and it was later selected by Judith Merrill for best of the year and so on, Derleth didn't care for it. He didn't like fantasies with contemporary or topical materials in them, and political and social references. So we at times had difficulties there. He also rejected my Edgar Allan Poe story that was afterwards immediately bought by FANTASTIC. But although we had difficulties, I always enjoyed working with him, and I certainly wouldn't have gotten my Lovecraft articles into polished form, my articles like "Through Hyperspace With Brown Jenkin" and "A Literary Copernicus," except for the opportunity that Derleth's books provided. So we got along very well together. To tell the truth, when Derleth began his posthumous collaborations with Lovecraft, I was rather contemptuous of this idea of his. I thought that we oughtn't try to imitate and carry on Lovecraft in that particular fashion. But over the years I began to see that this enthusiasm was there, and my heavens, now we have a whole flood of Cthulhu Mythos stories, so that today at the convention Bob Bloch was denominating it as a whole sort of modern school which had grown from Lovecraft, and I also realise that without that sort of dogged enthusiasm Derleth would never have persisted in his efforts to make the critics and the general public aware of Lovecraft, which have in the long run

proved so successful.

AMAZING: Do you think this constant reuse of the Cthulhu Mythos is beneficial, or is there a danger of stagnation?

LEIBER: [Laughs] That's a funny question. You know, for many years after Lovecraft's death I never would write a Cthulhu Mythos story. I had a feeling that this is just a sort of dead end, blind alley of writing, and I wanted to have no part in it. I finally went so far as to write "The Black Gondolier" in which I used, I think, Lovecraft's method of story construction, but of course I made no reference to the Cthulhu Mythos or any of the names and place names and entity names in Lovecraft's writing. And then about a year or so ago I wrote a pretty harsh review of Brian Lumley's *The Burrowers Beneath* and certainly a Cthulhu Mythos story *par excellence*. I took it apart and criticised it, and admitted my critical feeling about such stories. You know what the result of this was? I began to think, well, I'm a pretty weak character if I criticise something I haven't done myself. So I got tempted, and when Paul Berglund approached me, asking me to write a story for a book he was getting together for Donald Wollheim called *The Disciples of Cthulhu*, I finally decided I would try and write a Cthulhu Mythos story. And heaven help me, I've done it. So that pretty well answers your question.

AMAZING: What has struck me as a problem is that the assorted Lovecraftian entities are no longer frightening when they become overly familiar. You know, a shelf full of *Necronomicons* is no more effective than one, and probably less so.

LEIBER: Well I've got an angle on that. My story is set back in 1936 and 1937, 1937 being the year that Lovecraft died. And by making it a period piece to that degree, I think I'm in a

position at least to make the period come alive a little more. I'm putting it back in Lovecraft's time and it's a story that you might say Lovecraft might have written if he'd lived a few months longer.

AMAZING: Did you have any contact with him while he was alive?

LEIBER: Yes, I corresponded with him for the last eight months of his life it turned out. That began exactly in the same way as Robert Bloch's contact with him. Robert Bloch was saying today that he first got in touch with Lovecraft by writing to inquire where he could obtain copies of Lovecraft's earlier stories. In my case my wife did it for me without my knowledge. She knew I was crazy about Lovecraft so she wrote to him, care of *Weird Tales* or *Astounding Stories* and asked him where one could get ahold of his earlier stories. And so he started to write letters to us and offered to lend them to us. There wasn't any need for that, it turned out. Then he asked me when I had sort of hinted that I'd written some stories in the weird vein, although I'd never sold anything, to let him see them immediately. Then he not only read them but criticised them in a very friendly and considerate way, and also circulated my manuscripts among people like Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, August Derleth. In fact I wouldn't have met Bloch and Kuttner and Derleth if it hadn't been for Lovecraft circulating my stories, and so as I say this correspondence was voluminous. It had a big effect on my writing and continues to do so. So that was my main contact with Lovecraft.

AMAZING: Are any of your early stories rewritten at Lovecraft's suggest, the way Bloch's "Satan's Servants" was?

LEIBER: No, the only prose of mine that Lovecraft saw was "Adept's

Gambit," the first Fafhrd and Mouser story I wrote, and Lovecraft made no suggestions for rewriting there. He merely corrected my spelling and made suggestions for better word choice in a few places. For instance I had talked about a door that was activated by hidden hinges, or by a hidden mechanism. He objected to the word "activate" and said "worked" or "moved" would be simpler and better. There you have Lovecraft coming out for the small word against the big word. In another case he objected to the use of "intriguing" to mean "fascinating." He said this was again almost a modernism. He sort of frowned on modernisms of this sort. But outside of that, no, he didn't make any suggestions for rewriting "Adept's Gambit." What did happen was this: I got so enthusiastic for a few months about Lovecraft that I did change "Adept's Gambit" slightly in one version and introduce references to Nyarlathotep and have something chanting "Iä Shug-Niggurath." Later on I realised that this was rather silly to try and stick the Cthulhu Mythos into the Fafhrd/Mouser stories, so I suppressed that version, which never was anything more than a manuscript. I had about four different versions of "Adept's Gambit" before it was finally published by Arkham House in my book *Night's Black Agents*.

AMAZING: Was the Mouser series the first thing you ever wrote? How did you get started doing it?

LEIBER: It grew up in my correspondence with Harry Otto Fischer. I was at the University of Chicago at the time, and I met another chap from Louisville, which was where Harry lived, named Franklin McKnight and McKnight introduced me to Harry. Harry and I hit it off and Harry began to write me long letters. I had never written at great length in my letters or anywhere else before then, but to

keep up with the challenge presented by getting letters twenty and thirty pages long, why I began to write longer letters, and in our letters Harry and I began to create imaginary worlds, solely for the purpose of writing about them in our letters. We had really no idea at that time of making stories of them. So we invented several imaginary worlds together, and one of the imaginary worlds that was originally invented by Harry was the world of Fafhrd and The Grey Mouser, and the city of Lankhmar. Those things, Lankhmar, Fafhrd and Mouser were invented in a couple hand-written pages of Harry Fischer's letter. As we did with that sort of thing I latched onto it and wrote him a reply, in which I told a little more about Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, and we kept that up for a couple of years in our letters. But we never took it any further. We both began long stories, novels even, about these characters, and then abandoned them after a few dozen pages apiece. Then several years later Harry was working in the corrugated box business. He was a designer and engineer, and he had given up completely his earlier writing ambitions. But the magazine *Unknown* came along and with Harry's consent I tried a story for them about Fafhrd and the Mouser deliberately sort of fitting Fafhrd and the Mouser into the pulp story vein, and fortunately that was successful and I carried on from there. But as it happened Harry has not collaborated with me except in one instance. I mentioned that Harry began a long novel which was called *The Lords of Quarmall*, and he wrote that one about 1935 and completed about 10,000 words of it. Then it became apparent to him that this was going to be two books long at least if he ever finished it, so he never did anything more with it. And twenty-five years

later I finally decided that I was up to the job of taking these ten thousand words and writing a story around them that would also contain Harry's actual writing. And so I did that with my thirty-five thousand word version of it by the same title. Harry and I, at my suggestion, have simply split the income from that story on the basis of the wordage we contributed. He gets two sevenths and I get five sevenths of the profits, and that actually is just about the only collaboration that I've done.

AMAZING: How do you feel about the sword and sorcery field in general? Do you think there's a danger of stagnation there too? You may remember that a couple years ago Alexei Panshin called it a "literary fossil". How could it evolve?

LEIBER: Well we tried to discuss that on the panel yesterday, and I don't know—I don't think it's a literary fossil any more than the detective story is a literary fossil. It's true it's generally set in what you might call a particular sort of past culture, but it seems to me that it's just subject to the dangers of all such fields. If there's too much slavish imitation of past stories, well then people probably will begin to find it sort of dull and the field won't prosper. But right now it seems to be going strong. I think as long as the writers remain inventive and don't try to write sword & sorcery stories according to some elaborate set of rules that have to be used in every story they'll do alright. I'm not in favor of limitations of that sort myself. All these genres of stories are just convenient pigeonholes for cataloging stories for libraries and for the purposes of discussing them, of talking about them, but every story is a new creation, whether it's mainstream or some so-called genre, and so I think that the field for all I know may get stronger instead of fading.

ing out.

AMAZING: In writing a Mouser story, which is more important to you, the characters or the world of Nehwon?

LEIBER: Incidentally, Nehwon was invented by me in 1957 when Marty Greenberg brought out *Two Sought Adventure*, the first hardcover collection of the Fafhrd and Mouser stories, mostly the ones that were published in *Unknown*, and it was then that I decided that the whole series needed a name, and so I invented Nehwon, and—what were you saying about it?

AMAZING: Which is more important and more vivid to you, the characters or the setting?

LEIBER: They're equal, to tell the truth. Probably the characters are a little more vivid, because I have tried to put them in other backgrounds. In fact earlier in "Adept's Gambit" I had the Alexandrian-Hellenic age as my background, but they're both pretty vivid.

AMAZING: What is your basic method for creating an imaginary world?

LEIBER: Well, I can't rightly say that I have a basic method, because here my friend Harry Fischer performed the first act of creation. I have not followed the method of inventing the world carefully in the science fictional sense, I mean in deciding how big the planet is, what kind of gravity it has, what sort of an atmosphere, how long are the years, how long are the days, and then working down to the actual forms of life, and the history of the culture of the dominant race. To tell the truth I have invented the world of Nehwon as I have gone along with the stories, and I have just now hinted in my last couple of stories that there's a southern hemisphere to the world of Nehwon, but I've left it open as to whether it's a planet or a hollow world of some sort. I find on the whole that I like this method. It leaves me free. I haven't mapped out

the entire world of Nehwon, so there may well be completely undiscovered continents. I haven't pinned things down. I don't have a history of Lankmar that I refer to when I write a story about Fafhrd and the Mouser. I know as much as you'll find in the stories, and beyond that there's a grey mist.

AMAZING: You mentioned the possibility of Nehwon being another planet. It seems to me that most fantasy settings, including yours, are just alternate versions of the Earth's past, without the history. Do you think it permissible to set a fantasy on another planet, and then have horses and oak trees, and that sort of thing?

LEIBER: Well, no, not if you're starting out with the idea that this is a story about another planet. I don't see how it's possible to use horses except when you're using one of the basic science fiction gimmicks, such as an interstellar empire, and the idea is that the Earth was colonised in the past, or sent out colonies in the past, and if you have colonies made up of not only human beings but horses, or if horses originated on some other planet and came here, well then maybe. If you start out from the science fiction premise I don't really see having horses on other planets. You could have animals that serve the same function as horses, but it would be more stylistic to have them derive from, oh, a reptilian stock, or some other stock that had no exact analogue on Earth.

AMAZING: What fantasy writers do you think had the most influence on your own work?

LEIBER: Well, E. R. R. Eddison, *The Worm Ouroboros*, has had a great influence on me. I think Robert Howard has, and certainly James Branch Cabell and the world of Jurgin and *The Cream of the Jest* were influential here. You were talking about *Peer*

*Gynt* a while back, and I think that Ibsen and especially his fantasy, *Peer Gynt*, have had quite an influence on me. Those are some of the books. Dunsany, of course.

AMAZING: Do you prefer to write fantasy as straight escapist fiction, or to use it as satire the way Cabell did?

LEIBER: Oh I use it at times as satire and I like to link it with our modern world. For instance there's that story "The Bazaar of The Bizarre" and in it Lankhmar is menaced by some super-salesmen called The Devourers who are such dedicated salesmen that they hate to sell anything that's worth anything. They figure that the test of a salesman is that he can sell things that are utterly worthless, and this is a pretty obvious satire of Madison Avenue and the cheaper and more commercial side of Hollywood. I've gotten sort of a kick out of having smog in Lankhmar and calling it smog. Well they probably had smog in Rome and Babylon.

AMAZING: Do you think that this ever destroys the effect of the fantasy, by popping the bubble?

LEIBER: Yes, it can. It can. You have to be very careful with it. I get the impression from Ursula LeGuin's fine essay, "From Elfland To Poughkeepsie," that she feels strongly that some writers like Zelazny and myself are apt to do this sort of thing and pop the bubble. I don't feel we do, but that's really up to the readers and the critics to decide. If I have a character in Lankhmar say "Wow!", if I do it the right way, that doesn't spoil the fantasy. All I'm saying is, yes, in Lankhmar that's the equivalent of "Wow!" and just as I have them talking English in my story I have them using equivalent words to some of our modern slang, and I don't feel that pops the bubble. But I think here it's a dif-

ficult problem and all you can decide is, "does it work?"

AMAZING: Do you find that your heavily satirical stories, such as *A Spectre Is Haunting Texas*, date after a while?

LEIBER: Yes, certainly. You do run up against the danger of such things dating. They reflect my own changing attitudes. I mean the only president for whose election I ever really worked was Johnson. I was in that Stop Goldwater business. A couple years after he got into office, though, Johnson was close to the top of my hate list and I wrote *The Spectre Is Haunting Texas* to exorcise these strong feelings I had about Johnson and the Texas oil men, and so on. Then by the time the story came out Johnson wasn't running for president next time. He'd bowed out.

AMAZING: It seems to me that the thing is good enough as a story to live on, and it might, if only people don't try too hard to dig out the topical references in it.

LEIBER: Yes, I think that's true. There are topical references in all sorts of stories that were written five hundred or a thousand years ago, and we generally ignore them. Particularly when the topical reference is to the recent past, then we're specially aware of how jarring it is. But in a hundred years who is going to worry about Johnson and Goldwater and the Democrats and Republicans of our particular era? It would probably just seem an oddity, and not a topical reference at all.

AMAZING: Do you think your stories will be around a hundred years from now?

LEIBER: I don't know. That's what we're all working for, of course.

AMAZING: Thank you Mr. Leiber.

—DARRELL SCHWEITZER

# MRS. T

## LISA TUTTLE

*Lisa Tuttle's first story for this magazine was the controversial "Stone Circle" (March)—comments on which will be found in our letters column this issue. She returns with a finely crafted story about the changes in today's sex-roles, and one of their implications . . .*

**Illustrated by Tony Gleeson**

THERE WAS NO HEATER in the dirty white Ford, so Leslie drove wearing her heaviest coat, a man's Navy pea-jacket, and with the smudged windows rolled up. She wondered if Ron had gone back to bed. It had been vary hard to get up, to crawl out of that warm little den, this morning. Ron had ragged her, with a hint of real complaint in his voice, about this assignment.

"Look at all this! Is this supposed to mean something?" The contents of the folder, all the photo-copied pages and fragments, had fluttered down on the mounds of blankets.

"It's all I have to go on. She sent it, so I presume she'll tell me why."

"Why do you take these assignments?" he had demanded. "Why do you let them always make you the one?"

She was submerging herself in a sweater, an old one of her brother's, and her voice came out muffled. "Maybe this one will be something. I don't know. Maybe this woman really has found something out. Maybe she's made some great discovery, and I'll be the first to report it."

Instead of responding to that, he began to read, in an affected voice,

from an article she had already read several times on the wrasse, a fish of the Australian Barrier Reef.

"... each male has a harem of three to six females, all existing in a strict hierarchy controlled by the aggressive social patterns of the male. When the male dies, or is removed, the top-ranking female assumes his role, bullying the other females. Within four to fourteen days her ovaries have become testes and the former female has become completely male."

"Ok, Ron, I've read it. I've read all that stuff."

"What's the connection? This woman isn't any scientist—scientists don't send batches of clippings to newspapers with mysterious letters . . . I mean, look at some of this stuff! Advertisements, for God's sake. Ads for jeans and hairstyles. And all this stuff about dominance signals from baboons and chimpanzees. And this, about homosexual Indians—"

"Transsexual would be more accurate, I think," she said, brushing her hair hard.

He glanced at her from across the room. "Oh, come on, Leslie! This woman's a nut. She's the kind who

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# NEW



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Non-menthol Filter Brands	Tar	Nicotine	Non-menthol Filter Brands	Tar	Nicotine
<b>KENT GOLDEN LIGHTS</b>	<b>8 mg.</b>	<b>0.7 mg.*</b>	RALEIGH 100's	17 mg.	1.2 mg.
MERIT	9 mg.	0.7 mg.*	MARLBORO 100's	17 mg.	1.1 mg.
VANTAGE	11 mg.	0.7 mg.	BENSON & HEDGES 100's	18 mg.	1.1 mg.
MULTIFILTER	13 mg.	0.8 mg.	VICEROY 100's	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
WINSTON LIGHTS	13 mg.	0.9 mg.	MARLBORO KING SIZE	18 mg.	1.1 mg.
MARLBORO LIGHTS	13 mg.	0.8 mg.	LARK	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
RALEIGH EXTRA MILO	14 mg.	0.9 mg.	CAMEL FILTERS	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
VICEROY EXTRA MILO	14 mg.	0.9 mg.	EVE	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
PARLIAMENT BOX	14 mg.	0.8 mg.	WINSTON 100's	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
DOORAL	15 mg.	1.0 mg.	WINSTON BOX	18 mg.	1.2 mg.
PARLIAMENT KING SIZE	16 mg.	0.9 mg.	CHESTERFIELD	19 mg.	1.2 mg.
VICEROY	16 mg.	1.1 mg.	LARK 100's	19 mg.	1.2 mg.
RALEIGH	16 mg.	1.1 mg.	L&M KING SIZE	19 mg.	1.2 mg.
VIRGINIA SLIMS	16 mg.	1.0 mg.	TAREYTON 100's	19 mg.	1.4 mg.
PARLIAMENT 100's	17 mg.	1.0 mg.	WINSTON KING SIZE	19 mg.	1.3 mg.
L&M BOX	17 mg.	1.1 mg.	L&M 100's	19 mg.	1.3 mg.
SILVA THINS	17 mg.	1.3 mg.	PALL MALL 100's	19 mg.	1.4 mg.
MARLBORO BOX	17 mg.	1.0 mg.	TAREYTON	21 mg.	1.4 mg.

Source: FTC Report Apr. 1976

\*By FTC Method

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined  
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

sees the hand of God in tornados and pizza parlors. There's no story in this. Why do you let them give you these nut-cases?"

She crossed to the bed and began gathering up the scattered pages. "Because I'm a beginning reporter, and I just do what I'm told. It's all experience, after all. Dealing with nuts will prepare me for dealing with the big-time nuts like murderers and politicians. Now I have to go. And you'd better start getting dressed, too, if you don't want to be late for work."

He gave her a sly look. "Stay," he urged. "Come back to bed, and I'll tell you stories about the basic female orientation of the hypothalamus. We can play tic-tac-toe with xyy chromosomes. Make up the story, or tell your boss it didn't pan out. Who's to know?"

Leslie cranked the window down half an inch and let the fresh air shoot in, chilling the side of her face and invigorating her. Think positive, she advised herself. Even if the woman was a nut, think of it as a challenge to get a good story anyway. Ron hadn't tempted her away from her job physically—she wouldn't let him do so mentally either.

The sky was a dirty grey, merging with the bland, flat countryside and the highway flowing on ahead of her. The air tasted of snow, and the sky seemed to promise it, but there had been no snow in South Texas in the ten years she had lived here. She would not be fooled by false signs.

Green and white flashed at her out of grey, the highway sign vivid in the absence of billboards, and she slowed the car for the turn. The car began to shudder when she slowed to 45, trembling and complaining as it always did at that speed.



The house that was her destination was at the end of a street of tired, suspicious houses, all set back from the road and separated from their neighbors by the ruins of bicycles and children's games, mangled garbage cans and piles of brush. The street was empty, silent, and Leslie realized that all the children must be in school.

She parked the car in the last driveway. It had been strewn with flat white shells in a failed attempt to make it a proper, paved driveway, but dirt and creeping weeds predominated over the aliens from the sea.

Leslie stood a moment beside the car, hands in pockets, and looked up at the grey wooden house, trying to imagine a biological laboratory in there, wondering what the story was. "I think she's one of those crazy broads with some theory supposed to prove the superiority of women," Pète had said. "Women's lip, that's what it should be called. Just a buncha bullshit."

Leslie always managed to feel remote when the topic of women's liberation came up, as if she were removed from it. Her world was one of men, she had a man's job, she spent her life among them and had no women friends—it was not her problem.

She slung the camera around her neck and walked through the weedy lawn to the front door. There was a screen door and no doorbell, so she opened the screen and knocked.

"You're from the paper?" The woman's eyes ran over Leslie, who thought she saw disappointment, or disapproval, in them. She had met this reaction before. You? One young girl with a camera? That's all I'm worth?

"I'm Leslie Hawkins, Mrs. Teris-

oro." The woman ignored her hand. She was small, a full foot shorter than Leslie, with a taut, angry white face, raisin eyes and coarse, greying hair clipped very close.

"Come in." The woman drew back, abruptly disappearing into darkness, and Leslie followed.

She missed the cold outside air at once. The house inside was dim and close, the air permeated with dust. As her eyes adjusted, she saw that the room was filled with newspapers, improbably filled. Stacks of them covered every surface, only a narrow path remaining clear.

"We'll talk in the kitchen," the woman said. "I keep the table and chairs in there clear—that's where I work. But the documents—they pile up. All of this is for my research, and it's so hard to throw out something that might prove useful. I keep gathering evidence." Her voice had become more friendly; she sounded apologetic and shyly excited.

Leslie followed her to the kitchen which was indeed free of newspapers, although there were books piled in every corner, on the refrigerator, and on the table.

"My name," said the woman, "is Henrietta Terisoro, at one time Henrietta Baker, and then Mrs. James Gabriel Terisoro. Do you see?"

Leslie asked her to spell the full name, please, and wrote in her notebook.

"Your name? No, wait, I remember . . . Leslie, yes, that's a good, bisexual name—further proof. Names, you know, are very revealing, the way that masculine names have subtly shifted into feminine, and of course the cycle of popularity for individual names . . . But myself, I wonder whether to call myself Henry or whether, in James' honor, do you

see, I should take *his* name."

Leslie noted that the woman wore a baggy blue sweatshirt and jeans, rubber thong sandals on her feet.

"James died seven months ago. I wonder if the change will be complete in nine months, if it is a nine-month cycle? But, somehow, that seems too neat, too falsely scientific, do you see? I do not wish to jump to conclusions."

Leslie looked up, into the flow of words. "Could you please tell me briefly what your discovery is? Very simply and concisely if you could, so our readers will understand."

"But that is *your* job, isn't it? Making readers understand? You are the writer, and you do have some foundation in the biological sciences, of course?"

Leslie shook her head.

"No? But," the woman paused, looking puzzled, hurt and angry. "I told him, I told that man, it is important that you be able to *comprehend* . . ." She looked at Leslie suspiciously. "Why did the paper send you, then? Why you?"

Leslie had been given the assignment because she always handled the nut cases, the strange assignments, the unexplained phenomena and UFO stories.

"My specialty is the feature and the personality piece," Leslie said. "Since this isn't exactly a news break—"

"But it is! This is most important! One of the most important discoveries—"

"What I mean is, it isn't a news story in the sense that it must be covered at once, like a murder. This story can be written over a period of time, and be as long as it needs to be."

The last story Leslie had covered had been the reported apparition of Jesus on a screen door some fifty

miles further down the coast. Leslie had dutifully taken a picture of the imprint on the screen, but could never make out more than a vaguely oval blur either in person or on film, despite the cluster of the faithful at the door who had traced, their fingers held reverently in the air away from the screen, the features of the holy face for her.

Mrs. Terisoro nodded doubtfully. "But it makes things more difficult for me, do you see . . . people always make things more difficult, I don't know why. You read the clippings I sent, of course?" Her voice suggested she did not expect an affirmative answer.

"Yes, of course," Leslie said, a bit too forcefully, and then fell into a silence that lasted until she sneezed.

"Bless you," the woman said, sounding startled.

Leslie sneezed once more into her hand. "The dust," she said apologetically. "Do you have any Kleenex?"

"No, oh, no, I'm afraid not." Mrs. Terisoro shifted heavily in her chair, staring keenly at Leslie. "Are you married?"

Leslie shook her head.

"Oh? I would have thought . . . Engaged, then?"

"I live with someone."

"Oh! I see. Well, that's the way it's done these days—without benefit of clergy, but married in the eyes of God, as it were."

"It's nothing like that," Leslie said, feeling she must make this very clear. She always felt that she must make her relationship with Ron very clear. "It's not a common law marriage at all. Ron and I are living together, and at any time we may decide to go our separate ways. We're very independent, we both have our jobs and we don't want children—what's so

funny?"

"Your ignorance. I suppose you think that this young man and yourself are on an equal footing?"

"Of course."

The woman abruptly stopped laughing and looked down. Leslie saw loose flakes of dandruff on her scalp. "Things today . . . You must admit they're changing. Once there was an instinctive feel for place. Masters and slaves. Husbands and wives. But you can't escape it—the natural relationship, the only possible relationship, is that of the dominant to the subordinate. Those who are not one must be the other. The male to the female. You must accept it."

"That's certainly not what I expected you to say," Leslie responded lamely. Women's lib indeed! Damn that Pete, he must have known, and deliberately set her up . . .

"What do you mean?" Her eyes were quite black: Leslie could not distinguish the pupil from the iris.

"Oh, Pete—my boss—led me to believe that you—well, what he said was, 'One of those broads from women's lib.' But what you—"

"Your boss misunderstood me."

"Obviously." The woman's monkey-sharp eyes disconcerted her, and to escape them, Leslie looked down at her notebook.

"Does it frighten you, Leslie?" There was a whisper of tenderness in her tone, and Leslie looked up quickly, annoyed.

"Frighten me! What? I haven't even got a story. Nothing but a lot of clippings, nothing very unusual, and a few mysterious statements from you. Hints, and . . ."

"Dominance," said the woman. "If you want it in a phrase, dominance and submission. That is the key. Males are dominant and females sub-

ordinate. Or so they have been. Now, in this culture, things are changing. I can see the signs—anyone can. This 'unisex.' It's a merging, yes, it's a merging because the women are becoming males and the males becoming women. I can see it in you. Look, wearing pants and a man's coat and sweater . . . sneakers . . ." Leslie drew back as the woman leaned toward her, sniffing. "No perfume, no make-up."

"What have I to do with it?" Leslie asked. The old woman made her nervous. She was very aware of being alone with her in a strange house, on an apparently deserted street. Who would help her? Her throat was dry. "For that matter, you're wearing men's clothes. Could I have a glass of water, please?"

"My clothes, of course! Are you deliberately missing the point?" Mrs. Terisoro stood up; by an effort of will Leslie remained in her chair.

"My husband, I told you that my husband died. Let me show you a picture, oh, where . . ." Mrs. Terisoro paced around the cluttered room, her rubber sandals making fleshy, slapping sounds against the linoleum.

"Here, here's a picture of him, and one of me. This was some years ago. It won't really show you . . ." Some books fell to the floor.

Leslie looked at the snapshot. It must have been taken many years before. Mrs. Terisoro was hardly recognizable, wearing a scoop-necked dress and black hair to her shoulders. She was smiling and standing beside a man, a fairly handsome man, who was no taller than his wife.

"He was the man. He went to work and brought home money. He did his best to give me children . . . He was the man and I was the woman."

"But you worked, too. Weren't you a biologist?"

"No!" The woman sounded fierce. "I did *my* job. I was his wife. I stayed home and kept house and cooked. I had majored in biology in college, but before I could go on to graduate school, I met Mr. Terisoro, and we were married, and there was no need, do you see? But I kept up with my reading. That is what has enabled me to understand . . . to gather data and to see what is happening to our society—and to me."

"What is happening to you?"

Mrs. Terisoro stood very still before Leslie. Her voice became gentle, as if she spoke to a child. "I was a woman. Now I am becoming a man. I was subordinate, but now there is no longer anyone to dominate me, and I shall be fulfilled. I wonder who shall be my female? For, of course, there must be someone to dominate."

Leslie felt stifled by the house, by this woman's madness. She stood.

"I'll go now," she said. "I think I can sum up your theory . . ."

"Wait!" Mrs. Terisoro did not move, but Leslie stopped.

"You don't believe me," said the older woman. "I can see it. You are on the verge of believing, but can't face it. Look!" She lifted her sweat-shirt triumphantly high, revealing a pair of withered dugs. "They are shrivelling, disappearing. You saw the pictures, how lovely a woman I was—my breasts were large and firm then. Look, you can see, they're shrinking, shrivelling more every day."

Leslie turned her head.

"Don't refuse to see—it will happen to you, as well, and you must be prepared to understand and to accept. It is a very wonderful thing, to be allowed both sides of life. And I am

truly becoming a man, not merely ceasing to be a woman—look—" she fumbled with the zipper of her pants; Leslie was unable not to watch.

"You can't really see . . . the hair . . . but the signs are there. These lumps, growing here—give me your hand—" Mrs. Terisoro pressed Leslie's hand beneath and against herself. "Feel them? They're growing. And can you feel how the vaginal opening is shrinking?" Leslie, tense and trying to pull her hand away, could not tell what she felt.

"You mustn't be frightened," said Mrs. Terisoro. "It is really very beautiful. Nature is a marvellous thing. I think perhaps you have begun to change as well—" Her hands were on Leslie's breasts.

Leslie felt her body respond as it would have to Ron's hands, and the current that ran through her made her feel sick and dizzy.

She left the house, gathering as through a growing fog her camera, notebook and coat, pushing away Mrs. Terisoro and her words as if they had been cobwebs. Driving home, she could not shake off the sticky dream. The cold seemed to numb, rather than invigorate, her.

She had been driving for a few minutes before she realized why the road was getting harder to see. Fat wet flakes, more like solid rain than actual snow, hit the windshield and disintegrated. She turned on the windshield wipers, but the snow did not last long.

Ron was home. She did not at first realize that this was odd, nor did she realize his mood when she came in.

"Aren't you even curious as to why I'm home?"

"It's that early?" She glanced at the clock. "I had a pretty weird experience today—it kind of shook me." Al-

ready it seemed very far away, and she wondered at herself for her irrationality. Just a crazy old woman, after all—she had run into enough of them before.

"I quit."

"What?"

"My job. I quit my job today. I just couldn't take it anymore." Ron was long and thin, with golden hair that brushed his shoulders. When he was excited, as now, he moved jerkily around the room, shaking his hair into his face and then out again. "I mean, I thought to myself, I'll never become an artist, not really, never have the time or develop the discipline if I have to do this shit day after day. Layout! Who the fuck cares about layout! Sure, maybe once or twice a year they let me do a drawing, or design a cover—and then it's to *their* specifications. I can't be creative, or use my own mind . . ."

"Have you had lunch?"

"What?"

"We could go out, or there's some soup—"

"Leslie."

They looked at each other, and then she went to him and put her arms around him.

"I'm sorry, Ron. But did you really quit? I mean, for good?"

"Yes. I'm going to make it as an artist. A real artist."

"Here?"

"I thought I'd keep on working in my studio, yeah, unless—I mean, do you mind? You've always said that anytime I wanted to—that you make enough money for both of us—"

"Of course. It isn't that."

"Then what?"

"I don't mind. But you always said before that you didn't want me supporting you."

"It would only be for a little while. I'm sure I can make it."

"I know you will."

"Look," he said, after awhile. "Standing up doesn't cut it. You're too short for me. Why don't we go lie down?"

"It's all right," she said later, into the quiet. She continued to caress him with one hand. "Don't worry about it."

"I think it was the tension of the day. I just hate to disappoint you."

She kissed him. "You never disappoint me."

"We'll try again later," he said.

She jumped off the bed. "Who wants to take a shower?"

He didn't leap up as she had expected. "In a minute—no, stay there. I just want to look at you." She posed for him, thrusting her chest at him, then turning coyly half away. "The pill made your breasts larger, right?"

"You've already commented on the improvement about a million times," she said, annoyed.

"That's not what I meant. I think it must be wearing off. Your breasts are smaller."

"You're just jealous 'cause you don't have any." She went to the bathroom. "Are you coming or not?" As she waited for him, she studied her image in the mirror, seeing with a sinking heart that they were smaller, definitely smaller, and wondering when it had started.

—LISA TUTTLE

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## EVESDROPPING ON THE STARS

*It is very cold,  
there are strange stars near  
Arcturus,  
Voices are crying an unknown name  
in the sky.*

—Archibald MacLiesh

WE LOOK into a night sky filled with more stars than there are grains of sand on all the beaches of earth. Most astronomers believe that life must be plentiful among these distant suns. Somewhere in our galaxy, what we see as a distant glimmering may provide the daily sunlight for a race of beings far older and perhaps wiser than ourselves. Communicating with these beings is a very natural and a very old idea.

In the 1820's the famous German mathematician Karl Friedrich Gauss proposed that a large display of a Pythagorean triangle be erected in Siberia. Gauss apparently felt that any intelligent aliens worth speaking to would instantly recognize so fundamental a mathematical property. He suggested that wheat be sown inside the triangle to provide contrast with the dark trees outside. In Winter, the green trees would contrast strongly with the white snow. He also suggested that large reflecting mirrors be used to signal any inhabitants of the moon or Mars.

Similarly, Joseph Von Littrow, a

German astronomer, advocated digging a circular ditch in the Sahara about 20 miles in diameter, filling it with water and pouring kerosene on top. Once lit, the huge circle could be seen on many of the inner planets. Charles Cros, a Frenchman, later proposed that a huge mirror be made which could focus sunlight onto Mars and write simple numbers there as the beams fused the pink desert sands.

Our galaxy formed about twelve billion years ago. The Earth and all the rest of the solar system are only 4.5 billion years old. If we take this number—4.5 billion years—as the average time needed to evolve intelligent life (us), that leaves seven billion years in which other intelligent races might have evolved and be older than we are. These other intelligent creatures might have died out—either through warfare or simple boredom—or they might still be around. It is conceivable that seven billion years ago our galaxy throbbled with interstellar communication between technologically advanced races.

Gradually, as races spoke among each other a galactic library would accumulate. Aside from a vast array of knowledge about physical, biological and social phenomena, the history of civilizations and the story of galactic evolution could be stored there. If the

older races gradually died out, as new societies came into being and made contact with the galactic community they would inherit this library. They would add to it, pass it on and perhaps die in turn.

Even as they reached the end of their active life, it is not too ethnocentric to imagine that societies would still have some stake in passing on this galactic heritage. Their own history and achievements would be recorded there, and they might take the same sort of pride that an author does when he tries to insure that copies of his books remain after he perishes. This is also why we might expect to find beacons in the galaxy to attract young technological societies, so that the library could be passed on. This immense treasury of information could contain knowledge of social forms and structures most apt to insure the health and preservation of society.

Such knowledge could considerably extend the lifetime of the societies which receive it, and therefore raise the probability that a large number of intelligent societies now exist in our galaxy. Also, inconceivably different forms of mathematics, art, philosophy, or anything else which can be conveyed by words or pictures alone, would be part of our galactic heritage.

What is the price for entrance to this library? As we shall see, the easiest path may well be the construction of a large radio receiver. If contact is made, the biggest price we might have to pay is cultural shock. Historically, contact between two terrestrial cultures has almost always been bad news for the weaker one. But this analogy doesn't hold if the contact is solely by radio—no aliens are going to move in on us by space ship, simply because the distances involved are too great. Physical flights between stars take either much

money or much time or both. Anyone who could cross light years of distance could probably solve their economic problems quite easily, too. They need not steal what we have. Even a race fleeing the extinction of their star might reasonably seek out uninhabited planets, not occupied ones, so that problems of conquest need not be added to the ones they already have.

Even if contact by space ship was completely passive—that is, a civilization simply launched robot probes toward all interesting candidate stars, hoping the probes would find some sort of life form there—the expense is still (pardon the pun) astronomical.

Suppose we tried to “seed” nearby stars with simple radio-sensitive robots. To bug the likely stars within 1,000 light years would require about a *million* ships. Using current technology these vessels would cost about 100 billion dollars each, assuming we used simple atomic technology available within a few decades. If we launched these armadas at the rate of 1 ship a day, it would take 3,000 *years* to finish. True, if we were vastly rich we might not blink at such an expense. For the moment, though—despite the reams of science fiction stories based on this most sacred of principles—interstellar voyages as methods of communication are appealing only as long as someone *else* foots the bill. So a search of the solar system for slumbering robots from other civilizations is an inviting proposition. It's immensely cheaper. If we stumble on something we'll get a lot for the investment; remember Clarke's 2001.

But it's simply too expensive to send sizable masses over interstellar distances. Instead, we might expect that other societies—as far as we can hope to understand them at all—would look for a cheaper method first: ordinary radio.

## GALACTIC WIRELESS

WE DO NOT know the nature of other civilizations, but we *can* be certain that the laws of physics are the same for them. The basic properties of electromagnetic radiation which were discovered in the nineteenth century will be known to other advanced races. Early pioneers of radio, such as Marconi and Tesla, believed they had picked up intelligent signals of extraterrestrial origin. The wave of popular interest and criticism following their announcements made these men retract their claims, and little is known about what they might in fact have observed. Probably, some of the many complex radio echo phenomena in our ionosphere were responsible. The idea of interstellar radio contact was revived in 1959 by Guiseppe Cocchini and Philip Morrison. Radio has natural advantages—it travels at the speed of light, and can be beamed into a small area of the sky.

Since 1959, others have proposed that lasers—intense, directed beams of light—are better suited than radio. Recent studies have shown, though, that the narrow width of the laser beam is its only advantage over radio. Using lasers requires polished optical surfaces, which quickly tarnish or erode. Also, larger receiving antennae are required. Finally, though radio can operate in all weather, lasers cannot. Simple cloud cover could put a laser system out of operation until the sky is clear. These and other economic reasons make radio the best candidate. This is fortunate, since we know far more about radio than about lasers, which are only about 20 years old.

In fact, radio is a fantastically cheap method of communication. Our unmanned Mariner craft which traveled to Mars and Venus in the 1960's kept in close contact with Earth, using transmitters with only 3 watts of

power. This is barely enough to light a small electric bulb! It seems incredible that such a low level of power could span the distance between Mars and Earth, over a hundred million miles. This feat is even more remarkable when we remember that our sun emits billions of kilowatts of electromagnetic waves. Faced with such an awesome source of noise, one might think that radio communication beyond our atmosphere—which shields out most of the sun's radiation—would be impossible.

Two tricks get around this obstacle. The sun radiates equally in all directions. A radio antenna, though, confines its power to a very narrow beam. An antenna radiates into a narrow cone of angular width about equal to  $L/D$ , where  $L$  is the wavelength of the radiation and  $D$  is the diameter of the antenna dish. As we shall see later, a good value of  $L$  to use for interstellar communication is about 15 centimeters. Radio astronomy antennas of 100 meters in diameter are common. Thus such a radio telescope could emit a signal with angular width less than a tenth of a degree. This kind of selectivity also applies to receiving signals.

A second advantage of radio is the fact that we can pick the frequency used. Again, our sun radiates over the entire electromagnetic spectrum, pouring energy into many different frequencies. We can select the frequency our radio uses, and concentrate the power into a narrow frequency range, or *bandwidth*. The Mariner sent tight, narrow bandwidth beams back to earth and thus could be easily picked out from the noise of our sun, even if the craft were close to the sun in our sky. These same principles will allow us to transmit and receive signals to and from a planetary civilization, even though it is near a star which radiates strongly.

## RADIO NOISE

THERE ARE other obstacles, though. Radio waves are absorbed by planetary atmospheres and by dust in the interstellar medium. Also, there is a natural "noise level" to the universe, since all matter radiates at all wavelengths in proportion to its temperature. Both absorption and noise must be overcome if a signal is to get through. If we were a civilization wishing to communicate by radio, obviously we would try to tailor our radio beam to avoid noise and absorption as much as possible. Luckily, there is a reasonably well-defined way to do this. Both noise and absorption vary with frequency; Figure One shows the power level due to noise and absorption as it varies with frequency in the range of the ordinary AM broadcast band—one megacycle.

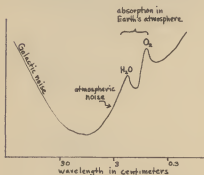


FIGURE 1

Radio Absorption and Noise (arbitrary scale)

At lower frequencies, galactic noise from the emission of stars dominates. At higher frequencies, noise from our own atmosphere becomes significant. Also, both water and oxygen absorb radio waves above about ten megacycles. At frequencies higher and lower than the AM broadcast band, the noise and absorption is far higher. Frequencies between one and 10 megacycles, then, are the quietest.

Broadcasting and receiving are the most trouble-free in this region.

Coccini and Morrison noticed that the emission line of hydrogen (1420 megacycles, or a wavelength of 21 cm.) is located very close to the minimum of the curve in the figure. They argued that this is a natural frequency known to all communicative races, and also one to which radio astronomers pay a good deal of attention. Hydrogen is the most plentiful substance in the universe and its absorption and emission line can be seen virtually everywhere. Despite this, there is relatively little noise in the regions around the hydrogen line. This seems to be a natural sign post in the frequency spectrum, universally understood.

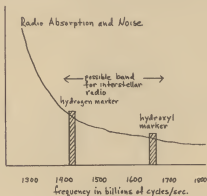


FIGURE 2

Another line exists at slightly higher frequency, the hydroxyl line. (The hydroxyl radical is one product when water is disassociated into its component parts.) These two lines are very nearly at the minimum of noise and absorption. For a terrestrial-type planet with a denser atmosphere of oxygen and water, the absorption at higher frequencies would be considerably stronger. This would shift the minimum to somewhere between the

hydrogen and the hydroxyl lines.

Many astronomers feel that this quiet window is the obvious place to look for interstellar signals. It is much simpler to search a narrow bandwidth than to look at all available frequencies. With this in mind, the hydrogen-hydroxyl band is almost ideally situated. There is also an uncanny poetic irony to this band; it lies between the products of disassociated water. What better place for water-based life to seek its own kind? We shall meet together—at the water hole.

#### SEARCHING THE SKY

*"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."*—Martin Rees

OUR INTUITION and basic physics tells us what bandwidth to look in—but what do we look for? Signals of narrow bandwidth and showing clear artificial signs would be a dead giveaway of intelligence.

Earth is already emitting such telltale signals. The early radio stations of the 1920s were weak, but they could conceivably be detected at great distances from the earth. The beginning of VHF TV 20 years ago and the recent use of UHF TV has made earth a noisy, bright radio source, second only to the sun in our neighborhood. We are the center of a sphere, approximately 20 light years in radius and constantly expanding, within which our VHF TV broadcasts give away our nature and location. (This may *not* always be the case. Space satellites can transmit programs downward to a vast area, so that economics may force powerful land-based television stations out of competition.) If we continue broadcasting UHF TV for another century, earth will be quite prominent in the radio spectrum out to about 100 light years. This would announce our presence to probably more than 10,000 solar sys-

tems within that range.

If a technological society lives about 20 light years away, they may have just now received a early VHF TV signal—or, with sensitive radio receivers, they might have picked up early soap opera broadcasts from the 1920s. In any case, from these signals alone they can tell very much about us.

Television or radio signals are distributed systematically across the spectrum (so that the stations do not overlap) and are fixed at particular frequencies; these are clear signs of intelligent origin. Individual stations will wax and wane with a 24 hour cycle, as earth turns. Also, there will be a slight frequency shift (Doppler shift) as earth moves progressively toward and then away from the target civilization, as we orbit the sun. Armed with this information, the creatures who picked up our transmission would know we lived on planet with a 24 hour day and a year of about 365 days. Looking at our star, they could measure its luminosity and using their knowledge of stellar spectra, they could pretty nearly guess the mass of our sun. Using the Newtonian laws which govern orbits (Kepler's Laws), they could immediately solve for the distance between the earth and the sun. Given this, and knowing our sun is a G2 type star, they could roughly estimate the earth's temperature. This would tell them enough to guess what our planet is like—whether terrestrial or gas-giant, how warm our days are and similar basic properties. All this, before the signals have been deciphered!

If this other race wishes to answer our signals, the return time is the same—20 years. We would need a sizable radio telescope to receive their messages. We could also think in terms of detecting *leaked* signals from other planets which are unintention-

ally radiating some of their internal transmissions into space, just as we are. Picking up such signals is not too difficult if the source is within about a hundred light years.

### BEACONS

DETECTABILITY is made far easier if the target civilization is cooperating—that is, they have built a beacon. If they transmitted a strong, narrow bandwidth signal containing information in all directions, we could pick them out far more easily.

Why build a beacon? Earlier we discussed the existence of a galactic library which might be passed down from one civilization to the next, throughout the history of our galaxy. Older societies would have something to gain by bringing new cultures into the radio network established between stars. These new races could pass on the galactic heritage and thus in some sense insure a form of immortality for the achievements of the societies now nearing extinction. On the other hand, simple boredom might motivate them to build beacons. The chance of learning from a new society a different twist in mathematics, art, philosophy or perhaps science, might be enough of a spur to support the expense. In any case, a receiver on Earth could search for both kinds of signals—leakage or beacons.

### RECENT SEARCHES

SINCE THE first preliminary attempt in 1960, there have been many unofficial searches for intelligent radio transmissions. These have usually been fitted into small gaps in the usual use schedule of the large radio telescopes. A more formal attempt was made in 1968 in the Soviet Union. Twelve stars within 61.6 light years were searched, mainly those of the G spectral type. The search was

made near the hydrogen emission line and yielded no positive results. A similar study was carried out in the Soviet Union on a wider bandwidth. (It is reported in *Communication With Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, MIT press, Cambridge, 1973.) Another Soviet attempt to pick up leakage radiation apparently turned up only sporadic emissions from our sun and our atmosphere.

Later attempts have been conducted at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Greenbank, West Virginia near the hydrogen line. G. Verschuur examined ten nearby stars (*Icarus* 19, 1973). Verschuur's target stars were all either M, G, or K stars. Several similar efforts are going on on a part time basis, and will probably continue indefinitely. All so far have, of course, yielded negative results. Perhaps this is not too surprising. Even making an optimistic guess, most astronomers feel that we must examine at least a million stars before there is a fair chance of detecting a single extraterrestrial technology. So far only about 200 stars have been examined. Some astronomers believe that the best tactic to follow, at first, is not to examine nearby stars. They argue that if a huge, star-spanning civilization exists anywhere in our galaxy, we should look for it. The sensitivity of our instruments is so low that these types of civilizations may be the only ones we can now detect without great cost.

Studies based on this assumption are going on now. Certainly the prospects of making an easy, relatively cheap contact with a very advanced civilization is enticing. However, such a society is almost certainly very far from us—perhaps all the way across the galaxy. An interchange of messages with them would require many thousands of years. A civilization within a few tens of light years, on

the other hand, would be able to exchange words with us within one human lifetime. This prospect is attractive to creatures such as ourselves, who live less than a century. It's always more interesting to ask questions if you know that you personally will receive an answer, rather than some distant descendant.

### PROJECT CYCLOPS

IN 1971 NASA sponsored a study of the cost and effectiveness of a radio search for extraterrestrial civilizations called Project Cyclops. Their report concluded that a large radio telescope array could carry out microwave communication over intergalactic distances and could search for either leakage or beacon signals for many hundreds of light years around us. They endorsed the "water hole" concept for limiting the frequency range of interest. This substantially reduced the estimated cost of carrying out a large scale search with radio technology now available. A system capable of making an effective search would cost about 6 to 10 billion dollars, spent over 10 to 15 years. The Cyclops radio telescope system would have four million times the sensitivity of the Ozma system used in 1960 to listen for intelligent signals from Tau Ceti and Epsilon Eridani. Its range would exceed Ozma's by 2000 and it would probe a volume of space eight billion times that of Ozma's. This would enable mankind to detect leakage signals from societies *hundreds* of light years away.

The search would almost certainly take years, and perhaps decades or centuries. Such a long term program demands faith. As the Project Cyclops report states, "Faith that the quest is worth the effort, faith that man will survive to reap the benefits of success, and faith that other races are,

and have been, equally curious and determined to expand their horizons. We are almost certainly not the first intelligent species to undertake the  
(cont. on page 120)

### SEARCH STRATEGIES

With an essentially infinite number of frequencies to examine, how do we decide where to look for intelligent radio signals? As Edward Purcell has remarked, the situation is something like arranging a meeting with someone in New York City without specifying the precise place. The obvious strategy—to us—is to look in the most prominent places such as the Grand Central Station, the Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty, etc. This is far better than simple random wandering through the streets.

A second general principle follows from the fact that man started cities only after he'd already overrun most of Earth. That is, civilization may arise because of finite resources from the surface of a planet. This means if intelligence follows a similar path elsewhere, the idea of economy will be ingrained. Alien societies will minimize the need for energy and material to achieve their goals. Planets with a finite surface area have finite resources, and competition for these resources is the spur of evolution. Ideas of economy influence our art, science and idea of beauty. Economy dictates that we choose the part of the radio spectrum with highest signal to noise ratio. An alien mind might have the same ideas of economy, and choose the same portion of the radio spectrum as we do.

against the Hraumachine and stare upwards at the wrinkled ceiling that distorted the cold light of the stars.

Without a sound, the room began to crack and fold. The floor fissured and buckled as if a great hand was pushing at an odd angle from below. Bo and Kezia were thrown down. Then the room became very dim, as if the grey light was a mist that could soften the harsh lines of the techtonic formations. Line and fold and up-thrust had created an interplay of geometrical form. For an instant the room was filled with intense white light, then darkness.

Kezia screamed and, as if in response, the ship began to thrum. Once again the room was suffused with dim light.

Afraid to try the glowing elevator squares behind him, Bo led Kezia around a step-like formation to a slidedoor which opened only part way. It joggled back and forth, but there was enough space for Bo and Kezia to step through safely.

The corridor was empty and well lit. If he had not just seen the walls fold and fissure, he would think that the ship was running smoothly. There was no sign that anything was wrong. Obeying an eccentric Hrau aesthetic, the corridor ahead seemed to curve upward into a spiral. Bo could feel the soothing thrum of the ship. But this is all false security, he thought. He could not remain in the observation room for fear that the damaged torus would discharge another salvo of benders; and if he continued through the corridors, he would probably encounter Hrau. And Kezia had become an angry waif with no memory.

"Remember the tribe-children who pushed their dreams at us?" Bo asked, afraid that the bright walls of the corridor might suddenly buckle.

"You thought they were pushing their dreams at me. Then you realized that you'd been dreaming all the while."

"But I can remember that," Kezia said.

"The insect-animal disguised itself with dreams. That's why most people could not even see it."

"But I would have known," Kezia said as if she was cautiously spitting her words. "If the animal could speak, it would have spoken to me."

"Your innocence protected it," Bo said as they walked out of the narrow corridor and into a large walkway with evenly spaced slidedoors and ceiling-high robot ports. There were no signs of life. Perhaps this part of the ship has been abandoned by all except the robots, he thought as they hurried across the walkway into another corridor. It was a dead-end; a row of elevator squares glowed dimly beside the far wall.

"What now?" Kezia asked.

"We'll wait. I don't want to use the elevator squares unless we've no other choice."

"We could go back," she said.

"I think we're safer here," Bo said, thinking that the elevator squares might provide their only escape. His back to the glowing squares, he stared at the corridor which curved out of sight behind the walkway. Bo felt trapped, as if the corridors were the steel intestines of a huge, dying beast and he was caught inside, forced to wander through the steel innards. He thought of the circles of Hell and imagined that the elevator squares behind him were its cold fires.

"How could my 'innocence' protect the animal?" Kezia asked, and Bo knew that his words were still niggling at her. He forced a grin.

"Well?"

"You could provide it with compan-

ionship and lead it around your world," Bo said, "but you could not reveal its true identity to others. It spoke to you in dreams that you could not remember."

"Then why can't I remember now?" Kezia asked.

"You're not using the logic of dreams," he replied, sensing the emotional barrier between them. He could almost hear her saying 'no,' as if she were afraid to penetrate into the darkness of her dreams. He waited, hoping that the world would not explode with his next breath, and picked through his past. He remembered all the Lynns and frosty-faced women in stickseed towns. It was as if they were all shadows of the same girl, a girl who followed Bo from town to town and spoke in the same tired voice.

Then something awakened inside Bo's head, and he felt the touch of another dream. He turned toward Kezia, but she seemed to be lost in her own time.

*"Formfollowers, whom you call 'insect-animal,' has been hurt,"* said the voice in Bo's head.

"Who are you?" Bo asked in a whisper, as if he was sharing his secret thoughts with monsters in a dark room.

*"I am called Egnesyei and, like you, I am a traveller."* Through the haze of dreams Bo remembered the alien standing beside a row of elevator squares.

"Why do you chase the insect-animal?" Bo asked.

*"To regain amilii."*

"What?"

*"Amilii encompasses our way of perceiving the world,"* Egnesyei said. *"Formfollower and I have been symbiotic partners and travellers since puberty. Although we are members of*

*two different species, we are biologically and psychologically interdependent."*

As if trapped in a Hraumachine, Bo was overwhelmed by alien thoughts and musings. "Then why did you separate?" he asked, finding his way from one dream to another.

*"Formfollower demanded separation after we found Halfte. He was one of the first time-travellers, and a man like yourself. Quite by fluke, we found him circling a black hole. His ship had malfunctioned and was passing through the event horizon, from which it could never return."*

In his dream state, Bo understood that a black hole was a star that had collapsed under its own gravity, and its event horizon was an area where space curved into a closed figure. One could pass through the event horizon, but never return. Bo perceived Egnesyei's thoughts and memories as pictorial flashes.

"If Halfte was passing through the event horizon, how could you save him?" Bo asked.

*"We couldn't save him,"* Egnesyei said, *"but his epiconsciousness, the patterns of his thoughts and memories, left a slight imprint on the geometry of space. That is what we saved. But the pattern cannot be projected unless Formfollower and I regain amilii."*

"But why did Formfollower leave?" Bo asked. He felt calm, as if he had settled in the eye of a storm that was breaking the world to bits.

*"Halfte became a strong presence, another partner. But he had also been a part of an extended-being. We had been drawn into a grander scheme. Billions of individuals had spread over the universe like a whisper, and could perceive and act everywhere. Halfte had integrated Formfollower and me*

into this ultimate symbiosis. The initial shock separated us."

"Then you're willing to bring Halfte into existence again," Bo said.

*"Formfollower is already losing his memory. Without amilii, he will become insane."*

"Is Formfollower all right?" Kezia asked as she touched Bo's hand. He sensed her thoughts as they both dreamed the same dream.

But Egnesyeyi did not answer.

Again the thrumming had stopped. The ship died for an instant. Light flickered, stopping motion, breaking up time into almost tangible pieces. He held on to Kezia and hoped that benders would not tear up the world. But Kezia was like a stone in his arms. And the world had become synchronistic.

The floor of the corridor began to crack and fold. A techtonic upthrust blocked the way ahead.

Bo pulled Kezia onto an elevator square, but it was not operating. He sidestepped to another. The whole row must be dead, he thought. Like frightened children, Bo and Kezia waited.

Then the thrumming began.

And they found themselves somewhere deep inside the ship which had become as quiet as heaven once again.

iv  
THE SHIP was a dead shark drifting through a black ocean. Its steel flesh had been twisted and knotted, its arteries, which had been corridors and walkways, collapsed. Most of the elevator squares, the tiny organs which produced its machine peristalsis, were inoperative. But, like any freshly dead creature, part of it still lived and functioned. Walls and ceilings and floors that had not been re-

shaped by benders gave off a dim wash of light. Bo hoped that the calamity had not opened the walls of the ship to space.

"Do you think that Formfollower and Egnesyeyi survived?" Kezia asked. She stood beside Bo in a dimly lit corridor.

"I don't know," Bo said in a whisper as if an unseen audience was listening. But the only sounds of life in this place were their own. "I cannot hear their thoughts. Perhaps it is difficult for them to reach us."

"I think Formfollower is dead."

"We should try to find food and survive as long as we can," Bo said. "The ship might repair itself. There might not be any more benders."

Then Kezia began to laugh. Her shrill screams seemed to fill the emptiness with sharp streamers of fear that could cut Bo to pieces. Kezia had lost her masks. She was a frightened creature snarling at the void, affirming life by the pumping of lungs.

Bo waited for Kezia to calm down. "We might, as well find out what's at the end of the corridor," he said. They walked side by side, but it was as if they were alone. Bo thought of Formfollower and Egnesyeyi, remembered how quietly they had invaded his mind. As he remembered their language of dreams, he thought: That was perverse fascination, a fascination with the coals of hell, with death and dybbuks, with ghosts and golems.

"Have you regained your memories of Formfollower?" Bo asked as they walked. The corridor was a tunnel stretching out before them. But something was different, Bo thought. There were no mirages and strange tricks of perspective, just straight lines and dim light. Perhaps those are the mirages, he thought.

"When I cut in on your dream with

Egnesyei, I remembered everything," Kezia said. "I can remember all my dreams with Formfollower."

"Do you believe in Formfollower's perception of the world?"

"It felt right," Kezia said. "It explained the world. Gave it a measure of reason and beauty."

But Bo wasn't listening. He stared ahead into the corridor which curved out of sight. Then it was a mirage, he thought, remembering that the corridor had looked like a straight channel an instant before.

"What is it?" Kezia asked.

Bo felt the wild wish of the man below the knife to fight and get it over with. He wanted to go out with a shout. There was nothing behind him but corridor, miles and miles of steel and mirage. He was caught in the grooves of a gigantic machine that was too large to be seen.

Kezia hurried to catch up with him. "It's brighter ahead," she said. They took a few more steps and found themselves facing an expanse of bright light which dissolved the boundaries of the corridor. "Where did that come from?" Kezia asked.

"Look behind you," Bo said. What had been straight corridor now appeared to be a grey wall which rose out of sight. "It's all Hrau mirage."

"But what's the purpose?" Kezia asked.

"I don't really know. I think it's just an expression of their aesthetic perception."

"You think like Egnesyei," Kezia said.

"I still remember his dream-language. I can even remember some of his thoughts and memories." Bo's voice trailed off as he stared into the bright dusty light.

Kezia walked toward the grey wall and shouted to Bo, "I can't find the

corridor."

When Kezia returned, Bo said, "I'm going ahead." Kezia touched Bo's hand and they stepped into the light.

And found themselves standing on sandy ground. In the distance was a rockscape of pleats and folds and cone shaped crags that jutted from the angry ground at odd angles. A red haze clung to the rocks and softened their harsh lines. Lightning cut across the dark sky. Above them, at twelve o'clock position, the sun was a greenish-yellow smear.

"Are we still in the ship?" Kezia asked.

"Yes, I think so," Bo said, imagining that he had fallen into Hell. As he looked around at the tundra and scrub growth, he felt a scream uncoiling inside him. It pressed against his throat. Fighting his panic by speaking softly, he said, "All of this might be a small part of the ship made to resemble a Hrau world. It might be tricks of perspective." He turned around slowly and pointed past a stunted tree toward a smooth expanse of rock that disappeared in the red haze. "You can barely see the ghostlines of beams and tiers there."

"It feels like a red-night," Kezia said.

Bo watched a huge rectangle of light appear in the distance. It framed a large quadrant of the sky and seemed to dispell the haze.

"What is that?" Kezia whispered, as if they were on her world again, slipping through the red-night.

"Look there," Bo said. He had seen something move near the stunted tree. There was movement in the scrub and near the perimeter of rock. He heard a snapping noise. Then a group of aliens revealed themselves. They had surrounded Bo and Kezia

and were closing in quickly, jumping around on single legs, using a muscular tail to stay upright. Their eyes seemed to hang about their long wrinkled heads like clusters of white grapes. Two forearms grew from a single chest stem, ending in grasping fingers.

"Stand still," Kezia said to Bo. "We haven't a chance to get past them. They might only be curious."

Mewling and making shrill noises, the creatures crowded around Bo and Kezia. One of them grabbed Bo's hand and made circular motions with his remaining forearm. Other creatures touched him lightly, as if they were trying to engage him in a tactile conversation. Bo noticed a tall creature with four forearms. It stood away from the others and didn't move. In the dim smoky light it looked like another gnarled tree drawing its existence from the dry tundra.

"These beings seem friendly enough," Kezia said.

"I think they might be children," Bo replied. "I'm going to try to push myself away from them." But when Bo tried to move, they pressed closer.

"Stop it," Kezia said. "They're pressing hard against me. I can't move."

Bo called to one of the taller creatures, but it did not respond. Perhaps the adults could only see their own world, Bo thought. One of the creatures had curled its arm around Bo's neck. As Bo looked at its wrinkled face, he tried to reach into its mind with his thoughts. He remembered the dream-language of Formfollower and Egnesyei. But it was no use. The creature might as well have been a stone extruded from the ground.

"Can you hear their noise inside your head?" Kezia asked.

Bo listened and thought he heard

whispers. "Whatever it is, I can't make it out."

"Have you noticed that you're not afraid?"

That's it, Bo thought. If these creatures can generate an emotion net like Hrau, then they must be telepathic. He tried to reach them and found that he was dreaming to himself. There could be no communication. He considered trying to push his way out again, but they pressed closer, walled him up with their hard flesh.

There was no movement; all the creatures seemed to have turned to warm stone. The rectangle of light in the sky had become a screen projection, an eye into the ship, Bo thought. As he stared at the projection, he witnessed the death of the starship and most of its citizens. Then the screen was filled with the faces of a thousand splay-footed creatures. Wrinkled faces with wreaths of eyes.

A deep red haze descended from the sky like thick smoke. It became difficult to breathe. Bo felt as if he was drowning in a red ocean. The rock cones and crags looked like wavering dreamcastles in the distance. Kezia was a smoke-ghost.

"Try to break out now," Bo said to Kezia. But he couldn't move a muscle. He felt as if he was breathing with his eyes. He was a child nestled in a bed of autumn leaves. His world was filled with the aromas of ginger, clove, tobacco, mint, hyacinth, musk, cedar, and sweet grass. Perfumed smoke hung from his fingers and he swooned in an ecstasy of frankincense, attar, myrrh, olibanum, pomander, and jasmine. He inhaled the reek of his memory, the fetid smells of folk and Hrau and dark earth. Smell had overtaken sight as completely as blindness. But there were new worlds

of darkness. He smelled the music of a thousand beings. It was a dirge.

"*Try to break away from them,*" said a voice inside his head. Bo thought he was talking to himself, then realized that Egnesyeyi was touching him with dreams.

But Bo was carried away with memory and fragrance. Time was a breath. He watched the worlds and mirrors spinning around, weaving ghost-trails of death, completing all the colors of joss, balm, stinkstone, and loblolly.

He was inhaling clouds and vomiting incense.

A SIX-FINGERED HAND covered with dark spiky fur shook him out of his reverie. Carrying Formfollower in the natural cradle of his shoulder, Egnesyeyi gently pulled Bo and Kezia out of the ring of splay-footed creatures.

"Formfollower's hurt," Kezia said, slurring her words.

"He will survive," Egnesyeyi said, but Bo could see that Formfollower had been badly burned. Almost all of his fur had been singed away, exposing mottled furrows of pink festering flesh.

Bo and Kezia followed Egnesyeyi across flat sandy ground which seemed to merge in the distance with the leaden sky. There was no horizon, only grey space. Bo imagined that this was a purgatory and fancied that the scrub and trees were the gnarled remains of lost souls. Behind him was the last circle of Hell.

"You witnessed a Zahl aspersion," Egnesyeyi said. His voice had a susurrant quality, as he spoke through several of his nostrils. "The Zahl, like Hrau, are communal. Love is an expression of the entire tribe. The red haze that you breathed emanated from the Zahl. It is made up of a fine

dust which contains microscopic genes. If the perfumed emanations are sufficiently complex, then certain members of the tribe will be fertilized."

"Where are we going?" Bo asked.

"There is an exit nearby," Egnesyeyi said. "It was the only one left undamaged."

"What do you want with us?" Bo asked. He needed time to think and escape the whispers and dreams that filled his head.

"We should remain together," Egnesyeyi said. "Our chances of survival will be greater if we combine our talents. Very few Hrau survived the cataclysm, barely enough to continue their culture if the ship could be repaired."

Egnesyeyi's susurrant voice traveled on the surface of Bo's thoughts like a raft sailing through murky waters. "What could we do?" Bo asked.

"I don't know," Egnesyeyi replied, "but action would be preferable to resigning ourselves to imminent death as the Zahl have done."

Bo thought of sleep and food, and tried to keep the rush of events clear in his mind. He thought he sensed Formfollower hiding in his mind like a burrowing night-animal.

"Formfollower has tried to communicate with the thinking mechanism of the ship. As far as we know, it was self-developing and the Hrau did not understand it."

"And you think we can?" Bo said.

"If we want to repair the ship, we'll have to try."

"There," Kezia said, pointing toward a square of bright light which cast sharp shadows on the surrounding rock-strewn ground.

As Bo walked toward the square of light, he tried to ignore the dream-echoes of Egnesyeyi's words. But he

dreamed that he was a moth being pulled into the flame.

They stepped into the light, and into the vastness of space.

v

BO WAS SURROUNDED by a panoply of stars, fiery pebbles and boulders that seemed to float in glowing clouds of dust. These were the stars he had thrown in his dream. They were the lanterns of the night, the lights and fires of eternity.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Kezia said as she stared at the stars below.

"Just remember that we're still inside the ship," Egnesyeyi said, and then he stamped his foot on the invisible floor. "Hrau come here to meditate. They believe that the ancient spirit and mind of the ship rest in this place."

"Why have you brought us here?" Bo asked. He felt that if he took a step in any direction, he would fall into the stars that burned like coals. A row of elevator squares seemed to float in the distance, but they were barely visible against the hazy background of stardust.

"Listen for a moment," Egnesyeyi said in a whisper, as if he were breathing the words out of several nostrils.

"I can almost 'sense' numbers passing through my mind," Kezia said.

Then, as if caught in Egnesyeyi's thoughts, Bo was aware of endless sequences of numbers. He imagined that the numbers were white ships sailing through his mind. Each one had a different shape. "Are you thinking these numbers at us?" Bo asked.

"No," Egnesyeyi replied. "I will not impose upon your privacy of thought with dream-language. You sense another presence, which might be a

manifestation of the ship's thinking mechanism. If we're going to survive, we must learn as much as we can about the ship."

"Is Formfollower recovering?" Kezia asked Egnesyeyi. The insect-animal seemed to be asleep in the cradle of Egnesyeyi's shoulder.

"He is unconscious much of the time," Egnesyeyi said. "His mind is freewheeling as he relearns amilii and restores his health."

But Bo could hear the rush of Formfollower's fevered thoughts as if they were stormwaves crashing upon distant rocks. He tried to shut Formfollower out of his mind, but he could not completely quell the telepathic echoes.

"We are inside a globular cluster," Egnesyeyi said, making a sweeping motion with his fur covered arm. "There are more than five hundred thousand stars like Earth's sun in this system. This part of the universe appears red because most of the near-by stars are red giants—ancient suns crawling towards their death. It is almost poetic that we should be thrown into this bright island of stars. It reminds me of your legend of Beauty and the Beast."

"I know of no such legend," Bo said, feeling uneasy under the constant stare of Egnesyeyi's gemlike eyes.

"The legend concerns humankind's fascination with its own destruction. Your history has always repeated itself. The playwright Euripides understood your race's deathwish when he wrote: 'When I am dead let fire the earth consume.' Then the emperor Nero changed the line to 'While yet I live' and set his world afire, entranced by the 'beauty of the flames.' Like you he sang of tragedy. Your ancestors once called that tragedy of ecstasy *Götterdämmerung*—it was the

myth that fired your race to take your small portion of stars, and then lose them. Humankind was powered by dreams without reason. But you have forgotten your past as if it were a bad dream. Perhaps it was. But no matter; it was a small dream."

"What does that have to do with the stars?" Bo asked.

"Out there lies our *Götterdämmerung*," Egnesyei replied. "I made a visit to the main control room, which was empty, and discovered that our course was radically changed. We are being pulled into a black hole, much like the one that trapped Halfte."

"Could we survive?" Kezia asked.

"Inside a black hole geometry collapses. We would be stretched to a line."

Bo looked into the bright sky of stars and understood what Nero felt when he said, 'While yet I live . . .' If I have to die, he thought, then let the universe follow me into the pit. Let Hell take the world. Bo was a sodspitter standing on the stars; his past life was not worth a thought against the slow storm of the universe. Songs and legends and words were worthless, he told himself. He felt the grinding ache of fatigue and the spasms of an empty stomach. "We need rest and food," he said, as if he was talking to the stars.

"You can find food units in any resting place," Egnesyei said. "Should you be disposed to try residue foods, there are defecation facilities." Egnesyei led Bo and Kezia to the avenue of elevator squares. "We'll call for you later. In the meantime you can make your decision."

"What do you mean?" Bo asked.

"If you join us, you will have to give up some privacy of thought. Formfollower and Halfte will only be able to communicate with you in

dream-language. But as we become familiar with each other, telepathy will become natural."

Bo felt only the need to be alone before the ship was swallowed by the invisible cannibal star. He wanted to hide in the past and take back all the silent times and miles he had walked alone. Now he would have no time to find himself.

He followed Kezia onto a glowing square, and found himself in familiar surroundings.

"This place looks like a Hrauhaus," Kezia said as they stood beside the elevator square and looked around the room.

"It's all Hrau illusion," Bo said. The pastel ceiling seemed to float far above him, and the far wall was lost in pale blue shadows. He walked across the room and sat down before an instrument desk that looked like a giftbox. He was immediately surrounded by flickering points of light.

"Are you all right?" Kezia shouted.

"Yes," Bo said, thinking of food and sleep as he traced his finger over a will-o'-wisp constellation of light. A silvery three-pointed object materialized on the desk before him. He traced out another pattern and the room darkened.

Then Bo was touched by Egnesyei's thoughts. When he awoke an instant later, he found two transparent packets of food capsules on the desk.

"I felt Egnesyei's thoughts," Kezia said.

Bo took a capsule and gave one to Kezia. He felt a dizzying rush of warmth as his strength returned. His muscles stopped aching, his arms felt light. "We'll have to sleep on the floor," he said, looking around the room.

"While you were operating the Hraumachine, that bubble appeared."

Kezia walked over to a tear shaped globe that was suspended in the shadows of the far wall. "It might be a sleepchamber."

"Be careful," Bo said, but she had already thrust her arms through the rainbow surface. Then she was inside the bubble; she was an iridescent figure turning slow-motion somersaults in the air. "It's like floating in water."

Bo followed, pushed himself through the oily transparent membrane as if he was diving into a lake. He felt as if he was swimming in clear water, yet he could breathe and speak. Everything seemed slightly distorted, as if seen through a prism. Drawing his arms behind him, Bo began a slow roll. He remembered swimming on hotsticky days, diving through shallows of sunlight to the dim world below where silver fish darted in and out of red coral castles.

"Have you decided about Formfollower and Egnesyei?" Kezia asked as she floated beside him. "Will you join them?"

"Do I have a choice?" Bo said, afraid that others might be privy to his thoughts.

"If you would prefer to be alone and think, I can find another room."

"It seems that I won't be alone anyway," Bo said sarcastically.

"Is that so bad?" Kezia asked as she drew closer to him. "Are you so afraid of your thoughts that you have to wall them up? If you remain inside yourself, you can never know anything else. You'll die in your own prison."

Bo fought to stay awake. He talked as if he was drugged on words. He imagined that he was at the bottom of an empty well; but when he looked up for the stars, he found only a dark ceiling. "I thought you believed in Formfollower's philosophy. The only

thing you can see is yourself, what is in your program. You don't see 'me,' you see what is inside you."

"But perception is change," Kezia said. "Whatever changes take place in you affect me as if mutual interactions was real. We're mirrors of each other. I can see my face in yours."

Bo pulled Kezia to him, and she made no attempt to push away. But he felt emotionally distant, even as he touched her. She was still a stranger; and he was acting out a part that he was not sure he wanted to play. "I sensed a closeness between us before," he said, but the words sounded forced.

They made love awkwardly and quietly, as if their noises would disturb the universe.

And then he slept, as alien thoughts filled his mind. He tumbled through dreams with Kezia and dared to hope that the cannibal star was not the dead mouth of fate.

vi

AS BO FLOATED beside Kezia in the sleep-bubble, he was taken into another mind. Kezia was still asleep, her arm covering her eyes, her muscular legs raised and spread, as if she was lying on a rounded bed of invisible feathers.

"Who are you?" Bo asked as he pulled on his overshirt which was floating beside him like a ghost.

"I'm Halfte," said a voice inside Bo's head; and Bo dreamed that he saw a man of about thirty-five with brown, greying hair and a thin nose that looked as if it had once been broken.

"What do you want?" Bo asked, imagining that Halfte was a ghost from the past, captured by Egnesyei and Formfollower like dust in a light-beam.

"I was curious to feel your thoughts. You are still sensing the sequences of numbers as ships sailing in your mind."

"Do you know what the numbers represent?" Bo asked.

"Numbers transmit messages. Any word or statement, even an entire language, can be encoded into single numbers. But most of the numbers that we've been able to decode seem to be random bits of information. It's as if the ship's computer, or whatever it has become, is spewing out everything in its memories in every possible combination."

Then Bo felt Egnesyei's thoughts as if they were sparks in a dark dream.

"The thinking mechanism might be articulating the whole world of possibility by demonstrating that meaning is a continuum of significant sequence," Egnesyei said. "Such a continuum would have to include every possible significant sequence as well as every actual sequence. But the continuum would only make sense in its entirety, which could never be reached. Although the odds are against it, we might be lucky and decode a useful bit of information out of the gaggle of nonsense."

Imagining that he was sinking into the icy depths of an ebon sea, Bo felt Formfollower's thoughts.

"In order for this world to exist, it must have a pre-eminence of order," Formfollower said. "But for the world to be possible, it need only be intelligible."

"Are you well?" Kezia asked Formfollower in her sleep. As Bo was taken into her dreams, he sensed her restlessness. He remembered that even after they had made love, she had only feigned sleep. It was as if a sharp burr of nervous energy was still tearing at her insides.

"I imagine that I've changed," Formfollower said. "But I can only see myself through dreams. Perhaps I'm dead or like Halfte."

"Formfollower still lives," Egnesyei said. "He dreams as he heals himself."

"Since we think we can distinguish a few things in the universe," Formfollower continued, "we believe it's real. But it can be real only if order is pre-eminent. The computer presence is ordering the manifold, searching for the number that encompasses the sequence. It will prove that the whole continuum is reflected in its parts, and those parts are the perceptual living mirrors of the universe."

Bo watched the fizzigs of alien thoughts, listened to the dream-whispers, and asked: "Why can't we find this computer?"

"If it was carrying on its own evolution," Halfte said, "it might have even freed itself from the bondage of matter. Perhaps it's become a construct of fields, a ghost evolved from metal and wire."

"The computer could be only a broken machine," Kezia said in her sleep. "It might not even be thinking at all."

And as Kezia began to wake up, Bo was still caught in alien dreams.

THE 'Meditation Room' was like a church on prayerday, Bo thought. It was filled with the susurrations of prayer, as if the very air was the stuff of holy thought. He looked up at the stars that burned in the red clouds of Heaven. But if this place was a church, it was made out of nightmares. The creatures that huddled on the invisible floor and stared into imagined heavens and hells were the myth-figures of folk prayerbooks. Bo did not recognize any of the beings except Hrau and Zahl. The Zahl stood

stiffly, balancing with their tails. Rather than meld themselves into the immovable flesh-nests of the adults, the young Zahl danced and hopped about; they paid no attention to the starfields that surrounded them. Bo could smell the Zahls' perfume.

The few Hrau in the room stood quietly together and gazed at the black hole ahead. It was a perfectly black point surrounded by a whirlpool of gas and dust. Bo imagined that it was a huge crimson eye wrapped in a whip of blue-grey smoke.

Bo felt a slight pressure on the back of his neck. He turned around and found a Hrau staring intently at him. The Hrau was dressed somberly in a workrobe and ceremonial cowl which hung in folds over his gaunt dark face; he wore no gems or mirrors.

As Bo walked over to the Hrau, he felt Halfte's presence in his mind.

"You have killed one of us on another ship," the Hrau said in his own language; but Bo understood as if he were listening to Formfollower's dream-language. "You relive it again, as is proper. Interior time does not unwind; it simply plays again."

"Can all Hrau read my thoughts?" Bo asked.

"If they chose to listen, they could sense your emotions," the Hrau said, speaking through his nose and mouth. "But I can 'sense' more than the others."

"What else can you sense?" Bo asked, afraid of his own vulnerability.

"I can feel an underbody of hatred growing inside the ship. That hatred will be directed here, probably towards you and the creature of shivering minds that you feed upon. This is only the lull before the dust."

As Bo felt his face flush, he imagined that he was a parasite clinging to the hide of a crawling beast. A

young Zahl approached Bo, scrutinized him, and then hopped away. "Can you communicate with the ship's computer?" Bo asked the Hrau.

"I can sense the numbers, but that is all. I remember when the mind of the ship was quiet."

"How long has it been an untouchable presence?" Bo asked, hoping that the Hrau might relate some history or legends of the ship.

"Do you think mind is something you can touch with your fingers?" asked the Hrau, and, clicking his fingers, he turned away from Bo. The Hrau stared into the rosy clouds of stars which surrounded the crimson eye of the black hole. Bo imagined that an invisible spider lurked inside the black hole and spun its gravitational web. It had already trapped the ship; in time it would claim all the stars in its red heaven.

"Perhaps the ship can be repaired," Bo said.

"Then it will be repaired."

As Bo stood beside the Hrau and looked into the sky of dying stars, he felt the touch of Egnesyei's thoughts. Egnesyei was a calm ocean overtaking him, washing away the litter of old dreams and memories, depositing fresh sea-animals of thought.

Lost in new dreams, Bo asked, "Who are you?"

"I am called Shujvo," said the Hrau.

STANDING BEHIND an energy scrim, Egnesyei positioned several small hover-robots around the torus that had once converted energy into 'benders.' He was comfortable with the portable control apparatus. The room was filled with reactor elements. The light was filtered to a dull yellow.

Although Bo was still physically in

the Meditation Room, he saw through Egnesyei's eyes, felt the touch of metal and the same curiosity and excitement.

As the robots glided over the ruined torus, Egnesyei gazed at a holographic projection that seemed to float above the control apparatus before him. He manipulated the robots by tracing complex patterns on the veils of flickering light that surrounded him.

The robots fanned out and began to jury-rig a power system around the torus.

"What happened?" Bo asked Egnesyei, and then waited for a telepathic response.

"I don't know yet," Egnesyei said. *"Although I understand the basic principles of this power system, I would need more time to study it. It operates by firing high energy particles at each other to create a superdense matter. In this form of matter, the particles forfeit their effective mass. Impinging neutrons from the reactor elements are 'swallowed' and their mass converted into energy. That energy is then channeled into the torus, the various impulse engines, and the ship's support systems."*

"Can you repair the damage?" Bo asked, uncomfortable with Egnesyei's memories and thoughts.

*"I can try to reverse the forward braking units so they will fire backwards to push us out of the black hole's gravity-well. That seems to be our only alternative. The other impulse engines are dead."*

BO DREAMED that the world was an infinite flat plane, and the beings that lived there had height and breadth, but no thickness. Stars caused the plane to crinkle. Heavy stars distorted the plane. And the black hole caused

the plane to fold over on itself. The flatlanders were trapped in a closed universe.

Halfte was a ghost whispering in Bo's ear.

*"Hrau seem to have a mystical relationship with their world,"* Halfte said. *"They have come to believe that the only 'outside' is inside. Their lessons try to fuse opposites, create a reason of unreason, mind out of no-mind. Instead of doing, they think in terms of 'being-done-to-them'"*

KEZIA MOVED QUICKLY through a transparent bridge which was several levels below the 'Meditation Room' where Bo stood beside Shujvo. Holding Formfollower tightly in her arms, she took a quick look at the Hrau behind her. They were bunched so closely together that they resembled a grey centipede, a crawling beast of arms and legs and a hundred heads. It moved through a long corridor as if directed by an ancient tropism. There was no rage, just mindless movement. The animal sniffed its way, leaving a trail of insects smashed and wriggling on the glowing floor.

*"The Hrau seem to be in a trance,"* Kezia said. Her voice was a whisper in Bo's mind. *"I've encountered several groups like that."*

*"Are they following you?"* Bo asked.

*"I don't think so,"* she said.

*"I can't 'feel' Formfollower. Is he all right?"*

*"He's asleep,"* Kezia said, *"but I'm afraid he might die and become like Halfte."*

Then I'd never escape, Bo thought, imagining Formfollower living inside him. *"Do you still believe in Formfollower's philosophy?"* Bo asked.

*"It has changed since Egnesyei regained amilii with Formfollower,"*

Kezia said. *"Egnesyei uses it as a practical tool, just another way of seeing, even though he doesn't believe in the substance of Formfollower's ideas."*

*"Then they are in basic disagreement,"* Bo said.

*"Like us, Formfollower uses language as a perceptual tool. His philosophy is only true when certain clues are dismissed. But unlike minds provide a dialectic."*

Halfte made his presence known by saying, *"And that dialectic produces a new language of perception. Two minds combine to make, in a sense, three."*

*"I've located the Navigation Room,"* Kezia said.

And Bo was looking into the room. He looked through Kezia's eyes, but sensed that Formfollower was waking up. Formfollower's eyes are stones, he thought. The walls and ceiling of the room were glowing. Wall panels simulated stars as colored dots. The black hole was represented as a black marble lying on a bed of vertical and horizontal red lines which bulged and curved, shaded into blue and grey, and affected the lines of neighboring boards. The magnetic fields of other stars could barely affect the cross-hatching of lines.

In the center of the room was a long control table. Anxious to make sense out of the whirligigs of shapes and colors that flickered across the instrument banks, Kezia leaned over the table. She was cloaked in a pointilistic rainbow of light.

*"Each bank corresponds to one of the ship's engineering systems,"* Halfte said.

But Bo was still standing in the 'Meditation Room,' as if only seconds had passed. He felt that time was a heavy liquid, and he was trapped in

its waters. The smallest movement would use up his energy. Time was too strong. It was pressing on him, then pulling him apart.

*—He was with Kezia and Formfollower.*

*—He was with Egnesyei, anxious at the controls, remembering other times when he had formed amilii with Formfollower.*

*—He was sensing the numbers in the "Meditation Room," watching the stars that burned steadily in the black wasteland of space. He imagined that the stars were being pulled into threads by an invisible handmaiden. In time she would take out all the color in the sky, leaving only 'no-form,' as Shujvo had described it.*

Bo stared at the starclouds and waited for the invisible spider of fear to crawl out of its black hole and devour him.

## vii

Bo's REVERIE was shattered by Shujvo's nasal voice. "I sense others coming. They are not like those in this room. They know nothing of the ship except that it is their world, and it has been destroyed. Although they're looking for those like me, they'll also find you."

"Then you'll come with me," Bo said as he looked toward the avenue of elevator squares that seemed to float in space. He noticed that the 'Meditation Room' had become even more crowded, but the others shied away from Bo and Shujvo. Bo had been too preoccupied with his thoughts and the stars to pay attention to the demonlike beings that scurried about and pressed into large groups which Shujvo explained were 'fleshnests.'

"I will remain here," Shujvo said. "If I am attached to form, then I mis-

perceive the world. But if I am not outwardly attached to any form, I am free. There are different kinds of binding and clinging. I don't need to claim anything, neither the notion of mind nor the action of thought." Shujvo spoke calmly, as if time had no meaning, or if it did, it was a plastic substance that could be stretched or compressed into an instant.

"*Get out of the room,*" Kezia said. Bo imagined that her telepathic whispers were streamers let loose in his mind, and he remembered the Hrau that had crawled along the corridor behind Kezia.

Then, as Bo was about to leave Shujvo and take the elevator squares to safety, he felt a noetic awakening. He was aware of the endless sequence of numbers. He 'felt' the ship's thinking mechanism. In an instant of intellectual delirium, he understood the presence in the room and its worlds of numbers. He mumbled "The sun's in my pocket" as if he were caught in a dream, and then the world *happened* to him. But the dreams overpowered him; they were too strong to be remembered.

"*Get out of the room.*" The familiar voices inside his head were insistent. But it was too late. Bo watched as Hrau and other creatures stepped off the elevator squares. The Hrau reeked with hate and fear which passed through the room like a shiver. Feeling suddenly nauseated, Bo took a few steps backward; it was as if all the hate had been directed at him. Shujvo took his arm.

Most of the Hrau were talking through their nasal membranes. The wild gibberish and susurrations of their whispers were charged with telepathic static, as if their thoughts were sharp stones sparking against metal in the darkness. A Hrau attacked Bo, but a

delirious Hrau was no match for human strength. A light punch to the face sent the Hrau sprawling to the floor. Hrau were fragile, like winter twigs, Bo thought; but the room was afire with their fear. They looked like child-demons playing in a small space between the stars. Bo tried to make himself inconspicuous; he 'settled in,' tried to fall into phase with everything about him. If he could cloak his emotional presence, he could 'feel' his way in the dark, become another shadow in the room, and reach the elevator squares.

But Shujvo was not as safe as Bo. He had his 'no-mindness,' but he was as fragile as any Hrau. Two unusually husky Hrau grabbed him. Before Bo could come to his aid, they had broken Shujvo's arm and ripped open his face. But Shujvo continued to speak calmly to them, raising and lowering his voice in a steady meter, occasionally making sounds through his nose.

Bo raised his arm to block a blow meant for his face. He saw the alien standing before him as if in a dream, as if the creature was moving in slow motion—its long, graceful neck was covered with yellow-green fuzz; its face was almost angelic, except for a stubby nose between its large watery eyes; and its waiflike body was piebald.

A blow to the stomach sent Bo to the floor. He retched, then regained himself, and pulled the alien's legs out from under. He delivered a sharp blow to the alien's throat and stood up. Kicking and howling and punching, he made his way to Shujvo. Shujvo was still speaking as if from a lectern, sympathizing with the others, warning Bo that he had already killed a Hrau.

Bo saw that Shujvo had lost his left eye. He grasped Shujvo's unbroken

arm and settled into the room as if he was a thin shadow, a quiet presence in the melee. The trick would work. He cloaked his emotional presence by imagining that he was a gel of consciousness spread across the room. His boundaries were the heavens, and his center was the bright avenue of elevator squares.

As he pushed through the Hrau, carrying Shujvo who weakly protested, Bo wondered why there was no room for Kezia, Halfte, or Egnesyei in his mind. Now that he needed them, he had lost them. He reached the elevator squares and Shujvo punched out co-ordinates on a dim board of colored squares and shifting lines. Then the starry room became only a small place in Bo's mind, a place where unfamiliar beings were working out the familiar schemes of love, hate, and death; but all the games and rituals had been played before. Bo remembered killing a Hrau on another ship. But the room had grown even smaller in his mind, until Hrau and Zahl were only motes of dust dancing in a lightbeam. There could be no grand emotions in such a small place, only bright glittering things dancing in the light behind his eyes.

HE FOUND HIMSELF standing in a well lit corridor. This part of the ship has not been affected by 'benders,' he thought as he looked around. He could almost feel Egnesyei's presence in his mind, but it was a whisper amid the shouts of his own thoughts.

"We've got to try to mend you," Bo said to Shujvo. "Is the pain very bad?" Perhaps he's in shock, Bo thought.

"No," Shujvo said. "There's little time for mending. The pained and broken parts are only shadows, part of

my corpse, with no intelligence or will. It can be placed where I please, like an old man's stick."

"Then you'll die."

"Not so easily," Shujvo said. "I'm just awakening. We consider life as a *sumiye-painting*. It is rendered without hesitation or intellectualization. It can only be executed once, for any corrections thereafter will appear as marks that cannot be rubbed away. It is the 'thing' caught while it is happening, the act of the instant. But *sumiye* is a 'wiping-away' process. Since the world is a realm of opposites, there is no escape but into emptiness—but that is a clinging, and any clinging binds you. So I sail without striving through the *sumiye*, seeing but not collecting my life."

"Without purpose," Bo said.

"Yes."

"Then why were you exhorting your kinsmen to stop fighting?"

"I was seeing out loud," Shujvo replied.

Bo noticed that Shujvo's eye-socket had stopped bleeding. The blood had dried on his face like a copper mask. Shujvo held his broken arm as if he was cradling a child. As they walked, Bo thought about *sumiye* and Shujvo's 'no-mindness.' According to Hrau, beauty was always ephemeral. It could not even be remembered as the-thing-it-was, for memory would change it into something else.

"Where are we going?" Bo asked, wondering if Shujvo's quarters might be nearby.

"I want to show you the *samaki*: the fish."

"What?" Bo asked.

"Just before the fighting began in the 'Meditation Room,' you experienced an awakening," Shujvo said. "I could sense that you were dreaming. But what did you dream?"

"I can't remember. Perhaps it had something to do with the ship's thinking mechanism."

"You mumbled 'The sun's in my pocket.' Can you remember that?" Shujvo asked.

"No," Bo said as he followed Shujvo through a transparent walkway. Looking downward, Bo watched a robot barge slide into a berth far below them. Perhaps the robots are repairing the ship, he thought. Wondering if the robots below were following Egnesyei's commands, he tried to reach Egnesyei with his thoughts. But there was no response. Bo felt that he was alone in a universe filled with the whisperings of thought. He was the deaf man in the crowd. The world was not as he had been taught. Folk had convinced themselves that each man was trapped in his own skull, destined to be alone forever with his thoughts. The Earth had lost its past. Bo felt that he had found that past, and lost it again.

"Here it is," Shujvo said as they entered a narrow walkspace. Bo looked into a transparent wall at the fishlike beings drifting through the dark waters of a huge aquarium. A fish swam toward Bo, changing its shape as it drew closer. Bo had the impression that it extended back into the green depths, that its size and shape were illusory, and that it possessed the entire area of the aquarium. The fish remained before Bo, as if it was staring at him with its grey bullet head. Bo remembered his terror when he had first sighted sharks in the clear waters over a coral reef. He had been an intruder in that water world, yet he had always felt it was still his world. But after a short dive, he would have to return breathless to the surface and swim in fear of the unseen creatures below.

The fish melted into soft shapes which dissolved, leaving only Bo's reflection on the glassy surface.

"I've been in a place like this before," Bo said. "But only for a moment."

"Every Hrau starship has the fish. They are part of the ship."

"What do they do?" Bo asked.

"They provide a telepathic matrix for all the beings on the ship," Shujvo said. "They become the human computer, our emotional 'connector,' if you like. All our emotional memories are contained in *samaki*. In turn, *samaki* is linked with the ship's thinking mechanism to give us objective-subjective history."

"Then you're all part of a group mind," Bo said.

"That was in the past. Now we are alone. Perhaps now that the ship and *samaki* are exhausted, we will reach 'no-mindness,' each in our own way."

Bo watched a fish glide slowly back and forth as Shujvo talked.

"What do you see in the glass?" Shujvo asked.

"Fish," Bo replied as the fish passed by in front of his face. There was something frightening in its smooth, ovoid shape. It was alien, and yet familiar, he thought.

"Can you remember what you experienced in the 'Meditation Room' before the fighting began?" Shujvo asked.

"Do you think that by standing here we can affect something in there?" Bo asked, touching the transparent wall with his fingers.

"Perhaps."

The fish glided past Bo again.

"Try to remember," Shujvo said. "Perhaps *samaki* can help." He paused, then asked: "What is the meaning of 'The sun's in my pocket?'"

Bo tried to remember. Almost as an

exercise, he imagined that he was on the other side of the transparent wall. He felt a twisting and imagined that he was swimming through a grid. Lines formed around him, providing guideways for thought. But the lines were imaginary, his own heuristic device.

The liquid was cold. It coursed through him as he breathed. He was breathing numbers and swimming in a water world of lines. He felt Formfollower's presence; Formfollower was the familiar matrix. As he remembered another world of condition-transition, Bo understood that there was nothing to cling to in that amorphous world. He remembered the sensation of being washed into a sea which hung in itself and was washed by itself. But he still could not make sense of it.

And then suddenly he remembered:

a line  
turning endwise  
becoming a point  
opening  
a  
peering through  
at all the other times  
possible futures  
faces  
the details of the world  
mazes  
droplets of dew  
frozen  
for an instant  
ice pearls  
on winter branches  
spiry cities  
a woman's hand  
fused earth  
his reflection  
in

Kezia's eyes and making love  
pounding

Egnesyei searching  
condition-transition  
dream language  
worlds without sight  
nightpourings of samaki  
into machine minds  
ghost machines  
searching through the layers of the  
world  
infinite regressions  
of matter  
benders  
the geometrodynamics of general  
theory  
the instant before a Hrau's death  
flying cities  
spores drifting  
insects  
children  
stad  
human nets of thought  
one level  
of  
synchronicity  
diverging from the others  
a never to be repeated instant  
numbers  
mirrors  
dream space  
sun in my pocket

It was over. Bo turned to Shujvo.  
"What did you see?" Shujvo asked.  
"Description would be a lie."  
"Then lie," whispered a voice inside Bo's head. It was Halfte.  
"Where were you?" Bo asked Halfte. "Is everything all right?"  
"We sensed you, but couldn't connect," Halfte said. "We are not one mind. This joining of different minds is a fragile thing. It is weaker than you think. But make your explanation. I want to see the replay. What you have experienced might have more consequences than you imagine. If we survive, we will add your experiences to our own and, perhaps, pass

through the layers of the world."

"Well, what did you see?" Shujvo asked again.

"I dreamed of two spheres hanging in three-dimensional space," Bo said as he stared into the transparent wall. "One sphere was as large as a sun, the other was the size of a pea. Then, as if I was a god, I divided the sun and the pea into a finite number of tiny portions. Each portion of the pea was congruent to a tiny portion of the sun. After I had matched every portion of the pea with a portion of the sun, I found that I had not only exhausted the portions of the pea, but also the sun. And I fitted the sun into my pocket."

"But that is only a correspondence between sets," said Shujvo.

"There are enough elements in the pea to match, one for one, those portions that make up a sphere as large as the sun," Bo insisted.

"—And with no two parts having any common points, the pea could be arranged to fill up the entire universe solidly," Halfte said. He continued:

"To see a world in a grain of sand,

And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour.'

That's by a poet who lived before your First History, a mystic called Blake who intuited the shadows cast by future mathematicians."

Bo watched the fish which was still swimming back and forth. "I can only tell you what I 'saw,'" Bo said to Shujvo.

"Continue," Shujvo said.

"As I dreamed of two spheres, I also dreamed that I was a silver fish nosing forward, or downward, into a universe of imagined lines and points. I was stretched into a line, and I thought that if the length of my fish-

body was the base of a square, there would be as many points on the base line as on the entire surface of the square. The base line would have as many points as a cube built from the square, or a hypercube built from the cube. As I dreamed of numbers and geometry, I found I was approaching the end of a line which became a point."

"Aleph is the number of points greater than infinity," Halfte said. "The term is older than your history. According to 'trans-finite' mathematics, the part is equal to the whole. And an Aleph can be multiplied by any number and still remain an Aleph—that which is above is like that which is below, another intuition older than your known history. It is possible that the universe consists of levels. Each level might be exactly the same as the others, and every being might have the same consciousness, upward and downward. But it is possible that one of the levels might diverge from synchronicity with the others: to experience that would be to experience the truly unknown."

"You said you approached the end of a line," Shujvo said. "What did you find?"

"I found myself looking into a point which revealed the myriad configurations of space and time. In an instant I thought I could perceive the totality of phenomena. I was overwhelmed. The vision was too great to be remembered; even now it's a blur in my mind. But I felt that I had had a glimpse through the eye of the universe." Bo could still remember the fishlike samaki swimming through the void. They were dark geometrical shapes following a predestined path. Their squadlines filled space into infinity. Bo imagined that his experience had been a melding of intellect

and emotion—the intellect defining the point, the emotion leading the way. He had been inside a dark mirror which reflected only shadows. The shadows had contained all the layers of agony, he thought. His flesh could not possibly contain the cold spirits he had found within himself.

"Does that have any meaning for you?" Bo asked as he turned toward Shujvo, but he felt himself being pulled by the samaki swimming back and forth behind the transparent wall.

"The words sound pleasant," Shujvo said, "but they have different meanings for you than for me. But you have found some of what you had forgotten."

"*Your mystical exaltation has taken a bit of your reason,*" Halfte said, and Bo dreamed that he saw a tall, heavy-boned man smiling wryly. "*You did not see everything inside that point. You simply saw more than you thought possible. But you did not push through the top of the world. Even with the help of samaki and the computer, you were not strong enough. You saw bits and pieces of the past and present. Your extrapolations of possible futures were lineal. You made no leaps 'above' or 'below.'*"

"Pull yourself away from the samaki," Shujvo said, and Bo felt the Hrau's hand on his shoulder.

Suddenly the ship came back to life and began to thrum. Then it was still once again. Death could not be so quiet, Bo thought; he imagined that the ship was a great beast holding its breath. Soon it would begin to purr like a tom. But Bo could feel the telepathic echoes of Egnesyeyi's fear and frustration.

"What happened?" Bo asked.

"I don't know yet," Egnesyeyi replied. "*It was a test.*"

"*The control board is dead,*" Kezia said.

Then the ship began to shake. Bo imagined that the great beast was dying. This paroxysm was a death spasm. Unseen hands seemed to be squeezing Bo. Through a haze of pain, he watched Shujvo fall to the floor.

"*The black hole is creating gravitational tides,*" Halfte whispered in Bo's mind.

Although the shaking had lasted only a few seconds, Bo felt that time had been stretched. He knelt beside Shujvo, then helped him into a sitting position. Shujvo leaned back against the transparent wall and samaki drifted in the darkness behind him.

"Death is very near," Shujvo said. He was breathing heavily.

"*Perhaps the Hrau can help,*" Kezia said. "*Can you bring him here?*" Bo remembered making love to Kezia; the memory of his awkwardness still embarrassed him.

"Can you help us?" Bo asked Shujvo.

"It makes no difference where I die," Shujvo said, and then he tried to stand up. As Bo helped him to his feet, Shujvo began to laugh.

"What do you find so funny?" Bo asked as he guided Shujvo through the corridor.

Shujvo exhaled loudly through his nose and said, "You can change only the ground of my death, but not the time."

Bo could almost feel the death hanging on to Shujvo.

The elevator squares were only a few steps away.

viii

AS SHUJVO ACTIVATED the control table, the Navigation Room came alive again. Walls and ceiling began to

glow, suffusing the room with the rich light of a red-night. Bo felt as if he was inside an alien creature that was constantly moving, changing its interior lines and spaces. Bo looked around, but a second glance in any direction would always reveal a subtle change in perspective. It's like the *sumyie*-bird, Bo thought—the mythical, fleeting beast that is always present, but just out of reach. As Shujvo had said, "It is the beast that vanishes with the looking."

Bo looked at the stars simulated on the wall panels. The black hole was now a black disk that covered the largest panel on the far wall. Dark red horizontal and vertical lines bulged around the disk.

The invisible spider that lurked inside the black hole had drawn the ship into its web. Now it was pulling its prey toward its 'event horizon,' a mirror of light suspended in space for an eternity, the image of a lost star.

Bo and Kezia stood beside Shujvo, who was a rainbow ghost leaning over the control-table. Bo thought that Shujvo looked like an old man. Now he understood why the Hrau had laughed when they had left the *samaki*. Although Bo could move Shujvo anywhere he pleased, he could not outwit the death slowly growing inside him. Bo could only choose the floor where the Hrau would 'fall.' Formfollower sat upon the edge of the control-table like a cat-bird perched on a branch in a drunk's nightmare. He was a chimera burning with all the fires of the light-board, a chameleon of shifting colors.

"We will feel high tidal forces even before we reach the event horizon," Shujvo said. "Unless we can effect a course-change, we'll be crushed."

Shujvo studied the board, then

turned toward a wall screen which looked like a window into another room. Egnesyei stared out of the screen. His spiky fur was dark brown except for light markings on his chest and arms. His eyes occasionally blinked, as if signalling in a special code. Small hover-robots skiffed back and forth behind Egnesyei. In the dim yellow light the reactor elements that filled the room resembled stacks of gold bars, the hidden treasure of a barbarian chief.

"Have you repaired the impulse engines?" Shujvo asked Egnesyei. "They would require very little power."

"I've turned the forward braking units around to fire backwards," Egnesyei said. "The other impulse engines are dead. But power is not the problem. We can generate sufficient energy. It's the thermostats on the heating elements that can't be properly adjusted—that's what caused the first unit to burn out when I tested it."

"Why didn't you turn the ship around on gyroscopes?"

"They were destroyed by benders," Egnesyei said.

As Bo listened to Egnesyei's words and Kezia's thoughts, he imagined that time had suddenly stopped. The dusty light solidified in the room. Shujvo, Kezia, and Formfollower looked like statues molded out of red clay. There were no sounds, not even a breath, just *s'myata*, the void given one last form.

In an instant, the world began again. Bo listened to Kezia's thoughts. He had become a part of a new universe where he could find privacy in the complex weave of his friend's thoughts. But now he realized that their edifice of thought was as fragile as thin glass. Their thoughts were not

forces that could overwhelm him; they were gifts he could easily lose. The least jarring of mind could force him back into the dark, quiet world of his own walls, the world he had once fought to keep. He remembered himself as a being without music, a shallow man without shadows. We have lost more than we thought to history, Bo told himself. We have lost ourselves.

"Another unit has burned out," Egnesyei said.

"Try another," replied Shujvo.

"This is the last one."

"Try it."

And then Bo felt a familiar thrumming, as if the ship had come alive and was thrilling to the pumping of a million steel hearts and the surging of energy through its miles of arteries. The ship had taken a deep breath, but it was quickly choked off. Bo was left with the sounds of his own breathing and the pounding of blood in his head. It's the silence of death, he thought.

Then he felt as if he was clamped in a vise. Unseen hands were shaking the ship. Bo heard a strange ringing in his ears, and discovered it was the sound of his own moaning. In an instant of delirium, he imagined that the ship was a bug trapped in the web of an invisible spider. The spider had attacked because the bug had tried to escape.

When the shaking stopped, Shujvo said, "Three banks of the control-table just went dead. I can only guess at our position. Before the shock, the instruments indicated that we could not escape the black hole's gravity-well on our own. But that burst of power might have been enough. The black hole is spinning. The ship could combine velocities with it and use it as a catapult, since a dense mass moving

rapidly will create gravity forces in the direction of velocity."

"The intense gravitational attraction produced by the black hole would fling the ship out of its gravity-well," Egnesyei said, his face filling the wall-screen as if he was a giant Argus trying to push into the room. "But if we approach the ergosphere, we might find ourselves a million years in the future."

"*We have a time-technology,*" Halfte said. "*We might be able to build a Tipler Cylinder.*"

"Have you tried to repair the shock shields?" Shujvo asked.

"The robots are doing as much as can be done," replied Egnesyei. "It takes time, I'm afraid." He stared out of the screen as if he was looking out a window into the shadows of Hell.

Bo could 'hear' Egnesyei's thoughts; they were tiny wild animals wailing in a dark room. Formfollower comforted Egnesyei with dreams, and for an instant everything was lost in a wash of condition-transition. Through diamond eyes Bo stared into a world of agonies. He followed Formfollower's dreams like a somnambulist.

"There is nothing more that can be done," Egnesyei said to Shujvo who was still looking down at the control board which made kaleidoscopic patterns on his face and chest.

Shujvo turned to Bo and whispered, "You've changed only the ground."

Kezia touched Bo's arm, then pulled away. "Even now I can feel your distance," she said.

Especially now, Bo thought, forgetting that his thoughts were also Kezia's. He tried to push through his walls, but he had trapped himself again in his own fear.

"*I'm afraid, too.*" Kezia's thoughts were dark streamers uncoiling and

settling inside Bo's mind.

He forced himself to be close to her. Touching her rough hand, he dreamed that death might be like a memory, a fading from one dream state to another. His fears gave way to bright memories of Earth and folk and small towns. He remembered an old woman who had a toothless grin that split her wrinkled face—she had chased him out of a Hraustop in Borger to catch him for her daughter. He remembered falling through ice, singing off-key below a waterfall, and being chased out of a nuns' commune for making up 'oldtime' words and 'be-bop' songs.

"*I need you, Kezia,*" Bo thought. But he was too late. She was caught in her own thoughts. She dreamed of the black hole and its ergosphere, the region where time stands still. An immortal could live there in a house of light above a non-causal world of darkness. But she would die, she thought.

Bo called her name, but she did not respond.

"*Let her alone for a time,*" Halfte said. "*She is searching out some of her possible endings. Her universe is constantly splitting into myriad branches. I think that we inhabit, simultaneously, two non-interacting, but equally real worlds. In one universe we are pulled into the black hole to die; in another we escape to live happily after—until the next quantum transition. So we live and die at the same time. At every instant of our lives we see the world obeying its familiar statistical quantum laws, but since we cannot stand outside of our perceptions, we cannot tell which branch of the superposition is the 'real' world. The world where we live and the one where we die are both real, each one unaware of the other.*

*Perhaps our consciousness has unusual effects on matter. In a larger sense, it really might be our own decision whether we live or die."*

"*True perception is the expression of many things in one,*" Formfollower said. He sat atop the control-table, his eyes reflecting rainbows. "*We reflect the infinite through the finite. But all the motions of the universe are inside you. What you think you perceive is an imperfect representation of real things, pathways etched into your 'units-of-self.' Every unit mirrors the world, the plenum of self and being."*

"*How can you still hold to that philosophy?*" Halfte asked Formfollower. "*It's a prison, a vision of darkness and aloneness, the construct of a hopeless being who can touch nothing but itself. But you are not 'broken' any longer. You have regained amilii. Haven't our thoughts affected you? You've regained your past."*

"*Only the most nagging perceptions have been enfolded,*" Formfollower retorted.

"Formfollower seems to have recovered from his accident," Bo said to Kezia. She grasped his hand tightly as she gazed into her possible and impossible futures. Bo imagined that she said, "*I need you, too.*"

"It seems that the shock shields have been repaired," Shujvo said weakly.

"Are you all right?" Bo asked Shujvo.

Shujvo was awash in the light of the control table. "There is still time," he said. "Do you have another change of of place in mind? The *sumyie* is almost finished; only a few more strokes of the brush and the picture will fade."

"He's dying," Kezia whispered.

"Then we'll take him in like Halfte," Bo said.

"What would you know of such things?" asked Halfte.

As Bo looked at Shujvo, he saw the simultaneous worlds of escape and entrapment.

"So you're looking at Shrödinger's Cat," Halfte said. "That was a hypothetical experiment thought up before your First History. It concerns the fifty-fifty chance of life or death that you were just thinking about. I'm visualizing a cat trapped in a room. In this same room is a radiation counter and a hammer which will smash a flask of acid upon discharge of the counter. Although the counter contains only a trace of radioactive material, there is a fifty percent chance that a nucleus will decay within an hour. So it's a fifty-fifty chance that the cat will be poisoned. Mathematically, at the end of one hour the total wave function for the system will be such that the dead cat and the living cat will be mixed in equal amounts."

"But that's only a statistical prediction," Bo thought. "And it doesn't even make sense." Then he felt the ghostfingers of a dream and was transported to a world of wave functions, superpositions of vectors, eigenvalues, systems, observers, and statistical weights.

"Do your 'aleph points' make sense?" Halfte asked. "Your everyday language cannot accurately describe a world where chance is absolute and not simply a measure of our ignorance. The universe is more complex than we can imagine. It is a cell undergoing constant mitosis, eternally splitting into new universes which are also fissioning. Our universe is being continually created out of the innumerable interactions between its myriad components. Every quantum transition that occurs on even the most re-

mote star is splitting us into copies of ourselves. But each copy is equally real, and each one is unaware of the others. All the possible and impossible worlds exist—the worlds where statistical laws have broken down, where light is dark and suns are made of frozen fire, all the dead imperfect worlds of the kabbalists."

"What about Shujvo?" Bo asked as he watched the skeletal Hrau bending over the control board.

"Shujvo will die first," Kezia said, "and we'll follow. So why take him in like Halfte?" As if wishing for death, Kezia had locked herself into one future: Only the black hole was real. It was a dark funhouse where clowns grinned in every mirror. It was a destiny in which hope would become death's ugly head. There could be only one possible universe, and the black hole was its sun and center.

"You're staring too hard," Halfte said to Kezia. "I was once sure of death. So I died and I didn't die. I was circling a black hole, precisely on the surface of the ergosphere, when my ship malfunctioned. Once I had slipped past the event horizon, there was no possible way to communicate with the outside world."

"But you were caught before you passed through the event horizon," Kezia thought.

"I wasn't 'caught,'" Halfte said. "Egnesyei and Formfollower found my 'shadow,' a wild, spiraling consciousness—an epiphenomenal field of flickering awareness. It was only a slight imprint on the geometry of space, but something was left: a ghost screaming for life. In the instant that I passed through the event horizon, they recorded and projected my ghost-pattern. My existence is an effect of their amilii. When Formfollower broke the symbiotic bond of

amili, I 'died' again. It was just another 'passing.'"

"Then we could take-in Shujvo," Bo thought. "He could exist as you do."

"No," Halfte replied. "There must be a reaching-out, not an isolation. Shujvo's 'no-mindness' is his own dark, private place. He has already chosen his way. If he wishes to die, we cannot cheat him. He believes that his 'no-mind,' his death, is the final unseeing, a proper phase of life."

As if in response to their thoughts, Shujvo collapsed onto the floor. "Leave me," he said to Bo who was fussing over him. "Only the ground of my death was yours, not the time."

"We'll take you into ourselves," Bo said. "You can live without flesh."

"Now that I can see death, you would have me cling to you? I want no binding. Let me be wiped away. I want only the last stroke of the brush. You have the *sumyie* in your memories. It will change with every remembrance, just as it changes now. Perhaps you'll find the whip."

"Take him," Bo said to Formfollower who looked like a fire demon perched on the edge of a burning bier. Bo felt alone; his thoughts and fears were chill winds howling through his mind.

He listened to the others: Egnesyei's thoughts were calm and clear—there were no kaleidoscopic spinings of memory, simply the mundane remembrances of lost conversations, customs, childhood sights and smells, odd moments. Halfte was remembering an ancient Tipler Time Machine, a massive cylinder rotating rapidly in space. If someone passed through a region near the middle, but outside the matter, he could return to the past or reach into the future—a sleepy thought. Kezia was dreaming of sky-cities skiffing across red skies.

And Formfollower was regaining amili with Egnesyei, sensing an 'outside' that was not a misperception.

Bo waited alone for the crush of death. He was living through his memories, imagining the forms of his possible futures, seeing his dead faces.

He imagined the ship hurtling into the black hole.

But the black hole was only another mirror. And it reflected Shujvo's frozen face.

ix

THE SHIP was thrown away from the black hole like a stone from a slingshot. But now, as the ship drifted at near-light speed, there was enough time for repairs—an eternity of time, if needed. Battalions of robots were at work everywhere, silently mending and rebuilding, as if the ship's makers had programmed them for just such a catastrophe.

As he watched a robot hovering over the control-table in the Navigation Room, Bo asked: "How long will it take to repair the ship?"

"It seems to be mostly finished," replied Egnesyei who stood well away from the control-table while the robot made its repairs. "I have not been able to follow the movement of robots, even on instruments, for the projected figures and diagrams change so quickly that they appear to just merge one into another."

After the robot had left the room, Formfollower jumped onto the control-table. Its light illuminated his face and fur, as if a kaleidoscope sun was setting behind a bush forest. "The instruments indicate that the ship is fully-functional. A course change could be effected."

"Where would we go?" Bo asked, remembering Earth and Kezia's

planet.

"I think we should take the ship to the Node World," Halfte said. "But I have no idea what we might find now that we have 'connected' with you and Kezia."

"What do you mean?" Kezia asked.

"We are independent extensions of the Node World. It is a truly sentient world, a life-form different than any simple humanity."

"Why should we go there?" Bo asked, stepping beside Kezia. But he found himself trapped in Halfte's dreams. Bo imagined that his questions were dirty grubs that Halfte transformed into great birds winging on the edges of dream.

"Through us, you have extended yourself into the Node World," Halfte said. "Your thoughts have changed the world. Every thought you have must leave a subtle trace. Have you forgotten what you experienced in the samaki-room?"

"Your experience of 'seeing' into an 'Aleph point' has been our only contact with the machine intelligence of this ship," said Formfollower. "But we have yet to communicate with this intelligence. Perhaps that could be accomplished on the Node World."

"It seems hardly worth it," Bo said.

"Was your 'seeing' worth it?" Halfte asked. "This ship might contain a unique form of consciousness which would bear only a superficial comparison with any starkind of our acquaintance. Its intelligence might be directed toward goals we cannot even imagine."

"How could such an intelligence evolve?" Kezia asked.

"I suspect from the Hrau's legends that generations ago Hrau opened the thinking mechanism to fuller consciousness," Halfte said. "This is an old ship. It had probably gone inde-

pendent before Hrau banned 'divergent species automatons.'"

"I think we must try to communicate with this intelligence, even if it means going to the Node World," Egnesyei said. "But we must all agree, for we might have to give up old dreams and parochial visions. It would be a gamble. Although we are independent extensions of the Node World, we do not understand fully the nature of its being. It is like Halfte's universe which is being continually created out of the innumerable interactions between its myriad components. I don't know what we will find, but we will probably be changed."

"I don't want to give up Earth," Bo said. "The Node World and the ship's thinking mechanism will not change folk and their world."

"But it would change us," Kezia said.

"Isn't that the object of living?" Halfte asked. "The object is to evolve, conquer the mysteries that frustrate us, and then find new mysteries, new worlds, new experiences."

"My planet is already conquered," Bo said. "And I feel a private destiny that must lead me back home. Perhaps there I could effect a small change. Is that less important than what I might find or do on the Node World?"

"You have already been changed," Egnesyei said. "We're like thoughts in a single mind. We could not be undone from each other without each one of us losing a part of himself."

But Bo was aware of their mutual dependence, their growing and sharing, their special freedoms which would be forever lost to beings trapped in their own skulls. He felt as if he had grown new organs for feeling, hearing, thinking, speaking, smelling,

dreaming. His old emotions were like shallow pools of brackish water occasionally rippled by thin winds. The present had changed his past: he saw his honesty as self-serving rationalization, his songs as unoriginal croakings, his seniors as short-sighted, crabbing fools. Yet he would have to return—even if he had to lose Kezia, and the other parts of himself.

"We must also consider the other beings on this ship," Egnesyeyi said. "They must agree to go to the Node World."

"It seems that the decision has been made for us," Formfollower said. "The control-board indicates that the ship is under automatic helm."

"What course?" asked Egnesyeyi, more curious than surprised.

"Direct for the Node World."

BO FLOATED beside Kezia in the sleep-bubble and dreamed that *samaki* were monstrous, deformed fish swimming below him.

"I want to go home," Kezia said, and Bo shared her thoughts: skytowns in winter, icicles hanging from eaves like glistening spears, celebrants slat-racing down narrow snow-filled streets, sleepy nights in a smoke-filled room above a crowded square, boes huddled together in the cold, the rag-woman selling blue rum and hot water, then the melting, and spring—and above all the human movement, hanging in the sky like God's breath, were the sky cities.

"And what of Formfollower?" Bo asked. "You once said that he always knew where you would be. Could you be without him?"

"He's not what he was."

"And neither are you!" Formfollower said. He was a whisper cutting through their thoughts.

THE SHIP fell into orbit around the Node World. Bo and Kezia stood beside the elevator squares in the 'Meditation Room' which was crowded with Hrau and Zahl.

"It's like a magnet pulling at my thoughts," Kezia said as she gazed at the world below.

"Perhaps we should have stayed with Egnesyeyi and Formfollower in the Navigation Room," Bo said. He watched shadow-forms crawling across the surface of the Node World like spiders on a gauzy web. The world seemed to be out of focus, as if it occupied more spaces than Bo could imagine. He imagined it was a demon's lamp flickering in the darkest night of Hell.

"Shujvo has found 'no-mind,'" said a Hrau standing beside Bo. "What will we find?"

"How do you know about Shujvo?" Bo asked.

"Through Shujvo you spoke with us all. We are mirrors of each other. Even if one of us falls—and that is his breaking, his doing—we are with him without words or presence."

"But Shujvo had to fight his own kind in the 'Meditation Room,'" Bo said, gazing into the starless depths of space before him. "He was certainly 'alone' then."

"Can you account for everyone of your breaths?" asked the Hrau. "We are not one mind, thinking one thought, having one emotion—we know no outcomes. The best we can do is participate in *sumyie*. Some of us were sick with fear. It shrouded our thoughts from others with less pain. Many were blind with action, but they were not alone. Why do you think Shujvo talked gently with them as they took his eye and broke his arm? Shujvo took your own thoughts to remind you not to kill. So you

were not alone either."

The air became thick with the pollen of the Zahl.

"Why is everyone pushing into this place?" Bo asked as he watched more Hrau stepping off the elevator squares.

"Because the world below is a mirror."

But Bo felt as if he was caught in a dream. Crystalline vines and fronds were growing in the empty space before him. "What is that?" he asked the Hrau. He reached for Kezia's hand, and found empty space.

A glass forest was growing around him, covering the black sky, creating a green heaven.

And echoing his screams.

x

THE WORLD WAS building itself. Bo watched crystalline trees growing, as vines wound themselves around the great boles like eyeless snakes. It was as if thousands of years were passing before him, yet every movement and shifting of light were instants stretched between eternities. He imagined that he was watching geological passings of time.

Perhaps I'm still in the ship, he thought as he held his breath for a million years, as lava bubbled into the blue-green forest world. In an instant the scene shifted. Mountains of topaz had been extruded into a daylight world. Cotton clouds hung above azurite spires and towers. Orange lakes reflected crystal hills and bowers. But the forest was still growing; it was a transparent overlay on the glassy pastoral scene.

As Bo looked into the synchronous worlds before him, he saw layers of time, objects and life as the simple strokes of *sumyie*. Past and future were simultaneous happenings here.

Bo was looking into a world that held its alternative pasts, presents, and futures, as if in amber. It was as if this place was not a 'place,' but a memory. History could not be a succession of events here. It was an interaction of modifying realities. It was a 'no-world' of probability amplitudes. It was consciousness modifying its eventualities, precasting its realities.

As Bo 'read' the shifting landscape, trying to understand its memory-surface, he felt a profound isolation. He had lost Kezia, Halfte, Formfol-lower, and Egnesyei. He felt as if he had lost his eyes and ears. Now he had his privacy, the privacy of his own thoughts and flesh. Once again he experienced the claustrophobia of his own thoughts and the prison of his body.

He looked for answers to his questions in the dream forest beyond, in the still pools that reflected trees and towers of malachite, azurite, diamond, copper, tourmaline, beryl, and ruby. He was looking upon the surface of a consciousness and could make nothing out of it. Vague images passed through his mind, ideas he could not grasp alone, lives he could not begin to understand. This world was a transparent being, hiding not the simplest thought, but its reality was so complex that Bo could not even see into its shallows. He could not imagine communicating with a being such as this.

"I am here," Bo thought, trying to reaffirm his own reality which he felt was being leached away by the memory forest. He was submerged in a dream world. Clouds drifted across the sky like great grey fish.

Bo tried dreaming himself into the world before him. But it was no use. "Where are the others?" he asked aloud. Perhaps Kezia is nearby and

I'm just not able to sense her, he thought. He stared into the forest and imagined that it contained the memories of endless entities. Glass flowers bloomed between crystal trees. The ground was full of stone life.

*"Your friends are experiencing their own objective-subjective realities,"* said a familiar voice inside his head. *"You don't perceive their presence because you're working, precasting, your own modifications of consciousness. You are all reacting differently to this entity/me and are apprehending different sets of experience alternatives. Just as you, for instance, sense that you are tapping some universal collective unconsciousness. For you, in this place, point-of-view changes become like Formfollower's language-philosophy. You see the whole in its parts and sense the invisible in the visible. It is as if you are experiencing a second dimension of time."*

Bo recognized the voice in his head as his own. Could he be making this up? he asked himself.

*"You have made a contact,"* said the voice. *"Would it have made a difference if you heard another voice? What you see before you is akin to perceiving in terms of condition-transition. You have superimposed familiar forms. But this contact is of a simple nature. Even though we are 'connected,' of the same being, true communication is almost impossible. My 'beingness' has evolved away from anything comprehensible to you now. What you perceived dimly was correct: you are not talking to 'me,' but only to my past, my memory, if you like."*

"How can I contact the others?" Bo asked.

*"Each of you modifies, interferes with, the streams of ever-changing al-*

*ternatives. If you can describe the qualities or basic conditions that manifest themselves simultaneously—that is, make-up a parallel description of the others' sets of experience—then you might make a connection."*

Bo thought about Kezia, tried to remember their shared memories, and imagined that she was beside him. She would probably be looking for him, he thought. But her memories would give her a different idea of this world-being. She would try to gain access to a different world, possibly to experiences Bo could not even imagine. Every instant of time, every precasting of alternatives, would change their consciousness, pull them further away from each other. This world-being could contain billions of years of accelerated evolution, Bo thought. And every cell and particle might be taking a different evolutionary course. A billion races perceiving different worlds could be hidden in the translucent threads of the glass flowers before him.

*"But you could modify your evolution as you wish,"* he thought to himself—the voice in his head was a whispering that could not be distinguished from his own thoughts. *"You could evolve by precasting this or that world-line, learn this or that history. There is as much information here as you dimly perceived with the aid of the samaki-computer link-up. And if you have the courage to 'see,' you'll find much more. All of this that surrounds you, it is the landscape that you have created. It is your telescope, or microscope. You may evolve with the looking. You may gaze as long as you wish. The thoughts, images, and emotions will not disappear before you can fathom them, nor will they flood your being, blinding you with sight."*

Searching for a means to connect with the others, Bo gazed into the forest. It was growing dark. The lakes became black mirrors reflecting grotesque, luminescent trees. Bo was looking for life and movement, not a dead forest of gemstone. But the creation was his; it was a map of his own fears and emotions. It symbolized all the nightmare shadows that swam like sharks behind his thoughts. Bo sought himself in the glass forest. But he was afraid of the dead realities that lay beyond his ken. In that instant he knew that he wanted a human destiny.

*"You don't have to end growth to have a human destiny,"* said the voice.

Transparent cables wound themselves around the trees, reminding Bo of human arteries and the thick vines of a rain forest. He imagined that the trees and cables were bones and muscle, or, perhaps, a section of an organ too large to be completely seen. He dreamed that he was looking inside himself. Then he noticed a large mass of chrysolite gemstone poking out of a black lake. The translucent green rock was shaped like a fish, and Bo dreamed that it was a dead, decaying blowfish, skin stretched over its bleached skeleton like torn canvas on a frame. Near the tear that was its mouth was a bulging onyx eye.

What were Egnesyei, Formfol-lower, and Halfte seeing? Bo asked himself. Would Kezia try to connect with him or with one of the others? How could Bo describe the others' sets of experiences and reach them? He imagined that Halfte would be trying to 'see' what lay above and below. Halfte would be searching for other world-levels that might exist in an infinitely layered universe.

But where can I begin? Bo asked

himself.

He felt trapped: any direction that he might take would lead him farther away from his friends. They might have already evolved into unrecognizable beings. But we are all part of this world-being, he thought. Perhaps this world-being consists of isolated beings unable to communicate with those unlike themselves. Collected together, these beings might form a greater presence, an 'epiconsciousness,' that could think and perceive as a single entity.

How much time has passed? Bo asked himself as he waited for the voice of his own cold thoughts. He watched trees grow into mountains which melted into dark pools which reflected his face a thousand times. A thousand different faces. All the voices of memory. All the quiet moments.

*"Language crystalizes your thoughts. One thing follows another in natural language, thus mimicking the flow of time, making them poor tools for thinking about eternal (non-temporal) subjects. Time is made up of itself. You might think of it as boxes inside boxes. But as Saint Augustine said: 'every now within which something happens is therefore also a succession.' If you want to reach your friends, then you must intuit space-time as a delusion."*

"I don't understand," Bo said, now staring into the glassy eye of the chrysolite fish as if he could find words swirling inside its translucent depths.

*"If space and time are a delusion, present only in subjective experience, then certain things must follow. Call the universe of experience World<sub>1</sub> and the realm outside experienced space-time World<sub>2</sub>. It follows then that all things separated in World<sub>1</sub> are joined*

in World<sub>2</sub>. Past, present, and future are real in World<sub>1</sub>, but unreal in World<sub>2</sub>. All minds are the same mind in World<sub>2</sub>, but individual in World<sub>1</sub>. What is a delusion in World<sub>1</sub>, is a reality in World<sub>2</sub>.

"Buried in your history is the story of Chuang Tzu, a philosopher who dreamed that he was a butterfly. But when Chuang Tzu awakened, he could not be sure whether he was a man who had dreamed that he was a butterfly, or a butterfly that had dreamed he was a man.

"In World<sub>2</sub> you and the butterfly are one. But in World<sub>1</sub> you would only be dreaming that you are a butterfly."

"But how could I move from one world to another?" Bo asked. "And how would I ever find my way back?"

"To enter World<sub>2</sub> you must leave World<sub>1</sub>, the realm of experience. You would have to dream deeply enough to dissolve the structures of your mind which constitute the world as passing time and open space. Dissolve the world of experience and all things will become one; all things lost can be found again, as if they were your own thoughts."

"Then I could find Kezia."

"Yes."

"And how would I get back?"

"The dream will end, yours and hers."

"Why?"

"Because we belong to World<sub>1</sub>, which is to say we are individual thoughts in the being who is all of World<sub>2</sub>."

It was almost dark. The world had slipped out of focus. Only the chrysolite fish remained sharp and clear. The voice in Bo's head had been stilled. Even the memory of the world-being had evolved away from him.

He was alone once again. But there

was still the onyx eye of the stone fish. He looked into it, hoping to find Kezia's dreams.

He watched and waited and dreamed.

dreaming eyes  
 sun's eye  
 Formfollower's eye  
 facets reflecting facets  
 faces inside faces  
 all the worlds bursting open  
 passing through the stone  
 dreaming  
 of  
 history and butterflies and Chuang  
 Tzu  
 dreaming  
 of  
 Kezia  
 remembering  
 finding her past  
 her life  
 an instant  
 reflecting just one possible future  
 then another  
 all the possible futures  
 a fan  
 of  
 infinite lines  
 searching Kezia's eyes  
 finding memories of sky-cities  
 Hrau  
 Shujvo  
 Formfollower  
 himself  
 glimpsing himself through her  
 remembering samaki  
 the computer presence  
 Shujvo's questions  
 Bo's  
 first 'seeing'  
 worlds within worlds  
 sun in his pocket  
 Shujvo dying  
 all the scrimms of the world  
 following Halfte  
 into another mind

losing him  
 memories  
 of the future  
 beings within the being  
 sensing  
 the planet-being's surfaces  
 a  
 resonation  
 a thrumming feedback between mind  
 and galaxy  
 mind and universe  
 mind and meta-universe  
 passing through his shadows  
 through his synchronous patterns  
 pushing through  
 universe  
 after  
 universe  
 growing  
 larger and larger  
 and smaller  
 stretching  
 he  
 sees  
 himself  
 on every level  
 dreaming  
 and

Then he burst through a universe that was not synchronistic with the others.

He was inside the mind of an alien, yet he knew that this being was a sport, an impossible shadow of himself. The yellow-orange sun warmed his pelt. He was a part of a herd of twenty animals that resembled lions. Their tawny fur was layered, as if new coats had grown over the old. The lions' eyes looked like silver specks: ships floating in yellow heavens. The herd was heading west, toward the rainforest, a blue-green shadow which seemed to darken the world. To the north, Bo could see a rim of mountains, blue and hazy in the dusty light. He could smell the southern

swamps in the wind.

Bo was overwhelmed by an ecstasy of concentration and creation. It was as if the animals were making the world, imagining the rainforest into being, creating the feel of grass, the warmth of the sun. With every step, Bo felt himself losing touch with his past. He was heading toward an eternal present where he could end all separations. In that present, the observer, system, and apparatus would be merged.

He imagined that the lions were creating themselves.

"I'm here," said a voice in his head. It was a wounding, a tearing of the present by the past. Bo tried to ignore it, but he was 'outside' again, separated from the world that imagined creatures living in constant ecstasy.

Another lion caught up with him. Bo stopped, looked into its eyes, tried to forget that the world had ended, that he was looking at himself, at his past . . . at Kezia.

BO FOUND HIMSELF back in his own world. His dreamforest was growing again. Moonstone flowers bloomed beside ivory trees. The sun was a fire opal set in an azurite sky.

He could feel Kezia's breath on his face, smell her musky odor, taste the sweat above her lip. His arms resting on her shoulders, he pulled away so he could look at her face. He was puzzled that the face was not his own. He experienced a psychic nausea, as if he had been reborn into a malign world of dark colors and shrieking sounds.

"So you dreamed of the butterfly," Kezia said.

But Bo had discovered a transparent being. Looking into Kezia's dark eyes, he experienced her memories as his own. He remembered moments of

her childhood: her first fright at the sight of her hand, a boy thrown over the edge of a shelf in a sky-city, her emaciated mother kneeling in prayer. He remembered Kezia's first lover, a handsome adolescent who smelled of strong soap. Her other lovers were submerged in the shallows of time. He saw himself through her eyes. And he gave her his memories.

"I had a contact with this world-being," Bo said. "I dreamed about time and a man who dreamed that he was a butterfly. I tried to repeat your experiences, dream your thoughts and memories—that was the only hope I had of finding you. I even pretended that I could dream your dreams. But I was afraid that once you had chosen a direction, I would not be able to find you."

"I left you a trail to follow," Kezia said. "I thought of the butterfly—it was a good image for our changing. I had hoped that the dream was strong enough to pass through the world and reach you."

"What has become of the others?" Bo asked.

"I lost them. They have passed into the world."

Bo remembered the lions as if they had been a dream. But the lions *were* a dream, he thought, and yet they were real. They were unconscious gods creating animal heavens out of their 'nonworld.' Bo felt that he had failed himself. He had forfeited the countless worlds of experience and understanding because he was afraid of losing his human destiny. Now he had his prison of flesh.

"We still have each other's thoughts," Kezia said.

"Perhaps we could remain here for a time," Bo said.

"The longer you remain in this place, the less interested you'll be in

Earth. We must return home. I've found what I've come for. And so have you. There's nothing more for us here."

—Except ourselves, Bo thought, dreaming of making love in the forest. "Perhaps we can find the ship."

"I think we're still in it," Kezia said. "But it's not ours to take. We're the only ones turning back. All the other beings on the ship are finding their way through the world-being. Why do you think we found each other? It was because we were both looking backwards."

"Then how can we leave?"

"We can give ourselves up. The world-being will cast us away."

Bo gazed into the forest and found the onyx eye which could pull him back to Earth or into himself. He felt more alone than when he had first met Kezia. It was as if blind destiny had brought them together and was now pushing them apart. "*We have just found each other*," Bo thought.

"We must not tarry," she said, as if she could not hear his thoughts. She was a stranger again, a scatgirl with a dark face and blond hair. "Every moment changes us."

Then she ran into the forest. And disappeared.

Bo shouted her name as the world began to melt. He heard a whispering.

"*I love you*," she said. Once again, crystal trees extruded from the ground, creating a new tectonic forest out of Bo's thoughts and fears. His thoughts were the rushings of wind, the crying of frightened animals, the jeering of children.

Bo found the stone fish. He gazed steadily into its onyx eye.

And jumped into the sun.

AS IF IN A DREAM, Bo materialized in a field of high grass. He felt like a ghost, even as he listened to the rush and gurgle of a stream somewhere in the distance, as he breathed in the cool night air, as he bent over to touch the blades of wet grass which squeaked when he rubbed them between his fingers.

The world has not changed, he thought. He imagined Lynn, Petrofi, Fish, Sam Groundcart, and the rest of the Roundabout gang were still tipping and smoking cheap hish in Aldo's Tavern. It seemed that only a moment had passed, but in that moment Bo had pushed through the universe, examined its worlds, fallen in love, found himself, and lost himself. Or perhaps it was a small eternity, he thought: the time it would have taken a washerwoman to scrub a shirt, a bull to rut, a baby to be born.

But why did I think that Earth would change? he asked himself as he began walking north, keeping the shadow-dark woods to his left side. He remembered Roundabout, a squalid hilltown with two narrow cobblestone streets and a church that overlooked the benches and pillories of the public square. According to town fable, the church had once been an old troll who had prayed with such fervor that God pulled his soul to Heaven and turned his flesh to stone. Bo had run afoul of the old troll, for across the street was Aldo's Tavern where Beelzebub's devils, dybbuks, and flibbertigibbets cavorted with all manner of folk and ghosts.

He headed toward Roundabout, toward lights and folk and noise and lovemaking. Behind him and to the west, as if in the darkness of childhood, lay the swampbogs and Hrauport. There, soap-bubble build-

ings floated atop thread beams and Hraumachines cracked and gouged the earth like huge crayfish.

He found the path that led into town. But, for an instant, he felt as if he had lost his grasp on time and was once again walking toward the bogs, toward the Hrauport and the ship awaiting him in the bowels of the earth. But where is my destiny? he asked himself. He looked up at the sky—the moon was a cold light inside a grey cloud, the stars were as thick as fog. Although everything was just as he had remembered, he had been changed. These familiar surroundings were now being magnified through the lens of time. It was as if Bo was walking through the same country he had travelled in his childhood. Then the world had been a small heaven and ghosts could be found in every tree. Folk were giants with booming voices. They strolled about as if they were Hrau and surveyed their kingdoms of huge things: houses that were a thousand footsteps high, forests that punctured the sky, chairs that could fit ten children, shoes large enough to hide inside, aprons that were really tents.

As Bo compared the cool summer night with the red-night of Kezia's world, he felt nostalgic for an alien planet where he had walked among strangers. He remembered the skypeople who had ignored him on the *Fragrant Cloud*. He had been a ghost there, he thought. But he was a ghost here. He was lost in this familiar place, lost in his own thoughts which might never be shared. Once again, he was trapped inside himself. Bo wished he had never left the Earth, but he had been in a white heat to board the king and fly through the mouth of the moon to find his destiny. Bo imagined he had found that

destiny. And lost it.

How can I regain the world? he asked himself. His Odyssey had dampened his hatred. But if he was to take back the world, he would need hatred. He imagined Shujvo's face. It was the face of every Hrau. It was as if Bo had killed Shujvo instead of a nameless Hrau on a ship headed toward Kezia's world.

Bo halted atop a hill where he had made love to Lynn and looked northward past the forest line at the fields which sloped gently into the flat lowlands. Here is good farming earth, he thought. But the countryside was lying fallow. A coat of trampweed and scrubflower covered the black land. In those fields he had gazed through his telescope at the starships passing into the moon. It was there that he had decided that he must find the stars. But the Earth had drawn him back.

He left the path to follow an intuition. He wondered if his telescope was still lying where he had left it. He had carefully wrapped it in a rag of canvas cloth. But he would have no use for it now: he had no wish to look at stars.

As he walked, he remembered what Halfte had said about the paradox of Schrödinger's Cat. He thought of his possible endings, imagined the universe constantly splitting into myriad branches, remembered that he occupied two worlds simultaneously. Every instant proclaimed a new destiny. In an alternate universe Bo was still with Kezia, passing through the Node World, changing, reaching, pushing through the top of the sky. Bo imagined dream lions grazing. He had been one of those beasts. And somewhere he was still one of them. In that never-world where rocks turned into flowers and

dreamed about love, Bo was still grazing with the herd and melting the world.

Bo listened for Kezia's thoughts in blind hope that she still might inhabit him. But he was alone with his thoughts. Alone, he thought. Forever alone. The wind seemed to talk in the trees. Whisps of fog hung from the troll-fingered branches as if spiders had grown out of Bo's childhood to weave ghostly webs around him. The trees were silvered with moonlight. Darkness would have been better than this ghost evoking twilight, Bo thought.

He heard something. Stopping where he was, he knelt down on the ground. The grass was wet and the earth had a heavy, acrid smell. He felt the dampness working through his trousers at the knee. Bo thought he had heard a voice, but he could not make it out. He crept forward toward the rise before him which blocked his view. Then he saw figures moving about like upright animals stalking unknown prey. That must be Lynn, Bo thought, wondering if she was pregnant. He recognized skinny Sam Groundcart and Fish, who aped the ostentatious finger movements of Ambia City and pulled on his gauzy whiskers as if they were weeds growing out of his pimply face. Bo recognized Aldo, a hunchbacked old man with thick white hair combed straight back and knotted into a bun. In the center of the group was Petrofi. Petrofi was kneeling on the ground and looking into a telescope.

—So Petrofi thinks that he can become a bo by taking my telescope. He's probably already broken it. Bo remembered how a rebel woman with a pocked face and dark thinning hair had shown him how the telescope worked. She had taught him such

magic words as parabolic mirror, flint glass, concave lens, crown glass. The art of making mirrors had been passed down through her family. Bo had paid a price for the magic machine. But a telescope could not bring back his past, he thought. It couldn't resolve the star that warmed Kezia's world—it was only a child's toy.

Bo stood up, shouted, and waved. A breeze brushed his face and he could smell the stink of the bogs. Petrofi will probably make-up a fantastic story about how he found my telescope, Bo thought. And the others will agree with him. Then they'll embroider their own stories. As Petrofi had said: 'Lies are always better than truth.'

"We thought you had left," Lynn said as Bo approached them.

"And I've come back," Bo said. "Can you work the telescope or have you broken it?" Bo asked Petrofi. There was only a lilt of sarcasm in his voice.

But Petrofi didn't look away from the telescope. "I can pull the moon down from the sky with this machine," he said. "It was a gift."

"From whom?" Bo asked, smiling.

"Well," said Petrofi, "I was lying in the grass watching the ghosts of folk that died in Roundabout. These ghosts sleep all day and wake up for the moon. They were sailing through the trees, popping out of the ground, and some were bathing in the moonlight. After a time, the ghosts began bringing me the pieces of this machine. Then they put it together and told me that I'd be a better bo than you."

"All that's true," said Fish. "I saw it all. I even know the names of the ghosts."

"Let me look through your machine," Aldo said, trying to push

Petrofi out of the way. But Petrofi would not budge. "I call you a liar and you're afraid to hit an old man with a round back." Petrofi continued to peer through the telescope.

"Where have you been?" asked Lynn.

"To the moon," Bo replied.

"In only a few hours?" asked Fish, wagging his pinky like a scatgirl. "Did you grow wings and fly? Or did you just think yourself there? Maybe you died and became a ghost and floated through the trees. Mama Laben says she's floated through trees with ghosts. She says that they carried her on their heads which were soft as pillows."

So I've only been gone a few hours, Bo thought, imagining that his hair had turned white and he had become an old man. He felt as if an eternity of time had blown past him and he was among the ghosts of his past.

"How'd you get to the moon and back so fast?" Petrofi asked, playing the game, vying for authority.

Perhaps I can reach Lynn and Petrofi and the others through dream-language, Bo thought. If I can touch their minds, I might be able to wake them from their private fancies. Then they might be able to glimpse the possible tomorrows that could grow out of the seed of the instant. It was as if folk were all asleep. Barely sensing the warmth of other minds, they dreamed their own private thoughts.

"Well?" asked Petrofi, still squinting into the tube. "To the moon-moonmoon, remember?"

Bo could sense the group as a weak presence inside himself. He realized that he would have to give himself up to them. But the walls of his mind seemed to be endless: to break them down would expose him to folks' mindless fears. But he had to try.

He told them about Kezia, Formfollower, Engesyei, Halfte, Shujvo, the Node World, and samaki. He told them about sumyie and amilii and no-mindness. He set his story to meter, added tunes and trills to the theme-melody. He relived each event. Each event was a bead on a thread of time, a thread which connected Roundabout with the Node World.

Bo touched them with his dreams. He brought them other worlds and senses. He felt the feedback of their thoughts and emotions. He was privy to their yearnings, hates, fears, prejudices, and the blindness of their 'common-sense.' He heard uncommon whisperings, saw different countries. Thoughts were roiling like smoke from a fire. As Bo peered into the minds of these folk, he imagined that he was communing with beings that were more alien than Formfollower or Egnesyei.

Bo was casting thoughts, imagining all the worlds splitting with every dream. Lynn and Petrofi and Fish were trapped in those dreams. Now they shared each other's worlds and dimly perceived that maddening crack in the universe: the Alpha Point.

Then Bo lost his dreams to sleep. Once again he was trapped in the darkness of his loneliness.

DAWN CREPT into the world like a smoky ghost, fouling the sky with its dun banners, hiding the moon and stars behind a cotton greyness until they could only be imagined as last night's dreams.

Bo had fallen asleep for only a few hours, and he was still bone tired. He dreamed that he could just sink into the warm earth and not have to worry about destiny or today. The grass where he lay was wet with dew and

almost preternaturally green. The world would emerge from the morning once again, Bo thought, and look as if it had been scrubbed and cleaned.

"The others should be back soon," said Lynn, who was lying beside him, her head propped up with her arm. "You had said that you didn't want to go into town. Why?"

"I felt I needed the world, not its constructions," Bo said. He knew that he would leave this place soon. He was already getting anxious. He looked at the mountains in the distance and thought of Shujvo's *sumyie*. But Earth could not be contained in any *sumyie*-painting. Bo could not imagine his world as a painting rendered without hesitation—it held too many layerings of paste-reality, all the smudges of a creator's hand.

"Why did you stay here with me?" Bo asked, remembering nights and early mornings when they had made love in places like this. Lynn was lankier than Kezia, and slightly taller. Bo searched her eyes for the blue sea shallows he had remembered.

"You became ill after you told us your stories and held us in your dreams," Lynn said. "Although you were shouting for us to leave you alone, it was decided that one of us would stay."

"Petrofi agreed also?" Bo asked, feeling like a fool because he would not take anyone's love but Kezia's. He wanted walls. All the walls of the world. Every darkness.

"Yes," she said. "He agreed."

Then I did touch them with my thoughts, Bo told himself. But he was too tired for a destiny. He wanted only sleep and the security of his own private sadness. "I'd rather watch this morning by myself."

"Why?" Lynn asked. "Did you take

us in only to push us away?"

"Perhaps I want to talk with the sky, whisper to the stars, sing songs to the ghosts in the grass."

"Then go ahead," she said, shushing him as if he were a child. She talked him to sleep. And he dreamed.

*He was floating in an ocean of darkness, feeling waves cresting over him. He was sinking through the thermoclines of his life, passing through the layers of the Earth. Lynn was far above the world. She peered down at him.*

*Something awakened inside him. Yet still he slept.*

*"I love you," said a familiar voice. It was a whispering, the sighing of waves, the grumbling of earth.*

*Then the world exploded into white light. White cooled to red as Bo dreamed that he was standing beside Kezia. He was looking down the street of a skytown that seemed to be burning in the light of red-night.*

*"Kezia?"*

*"I can 'hear' your thoughts," Kezia said. "Are you swimming?"*

*"No," Bo said. "I'm dreaming. I think I sense Halfte's presence. Can you?"*

*"Yes, I think so—I don't know how much remains of our memory of the Node World, but Halfte was a pattern of that memory. Perhaps we contain him."*

*"What of Formfollower and Egenesyei?" Bo asked.*

*"Perhaps we contain them, too. But I doubt it. If we have Halfte, it is because he was looking for us as well as pushing through the levels he was so curious to explore."*

*Then her voice faded, to be replaced with another dream, but the dream was meaningless. It was the flotsam of memories and fear. He heard Lynn's voice as a howling, felt it as an avalanche.*

*The Earth was disgorging him.*

*He searched for Kezia, but fingers had grown out of the ground to grasp and shake him.*

"YOU WERE TALKING in your sleep," Lynn said. "You said something about Halfte being here and there at once. You shouted for Kezia. I had to wake you up."

The sun seemed to be melting the world, Bo thought, as his cold sweat evaporated—it felt as if tiny spiders were running across his arms and chest. His clothing was damp, but the sun would soon dry them. I looked through the sky and found Kezia, Bo thought. He had found her in the crack of his nightmare.

"You slept away the morning," Petrofi said, standing over him, looking like a giant against the backdrop of clear eggshell sky. "You spoke inside my head last night. How can I see into you now?"

"You already know how," Bo said. He remembered how he used to 'settle-in' blunt folks' tempers, and 'feel' his way in the dark by falling into phase with everything around him. "Even before I spoke to you in dream-language, you were able to hear the telepathic static of Hrau. But you tried to ignore it and pretend it was never there. You have to learn to listen and dream."

Fish sat down beside Bo and offered him a piece of yellow bread. Aldo and Sam Groundcart stood well away from Bo and talked to each other in whispers. Aldo held a soiled brown bag tightly against his chest. His wrinkled face was scrunched into a tight mask, as if in anticipation.

As Bo listened to Lynn and Petrofi and Fish, he felt something awaken inside him. Then Kezia's thoughts filled his mind. He felt the familiar touch of a dream.

"I can feel your sadness," Kezia said.

Her voice was his thoughts. Bo dreamed that the universe was splitting into different worlds. All his thoughts and fears and hesitations were making new worlds and destroying others. Every instant of time destroyed his destiny and created another. Bo was blind. He stumbled forward from dream to dream, and fell into the cracks of the world.

*"Perhaps we should have stayed on the Node World,"* Kezia said. *"What destinies can we have now? We're too weak to change anything. We can only hide from ourselves."*

But Bo felt something touch him. He heard a new voice. He gazed at Lynn and Petrofi. Fish offered him another piece of bread and grinned.

Bo listened. A tiny voice was gabbling inside his head. *"IcanseeIcanseeIcansee."* The voice grew. The dream became stronger. Bo dreamed of a toadfish swimming in a pond. Then the toadfish grew wings and flew into the sky.

"What is it?" Kezia asked.

*"I think Fish has found his voice,"* Bo said to Kezia. *"He's learned to speak in dream-language. You see, the world has already changed."* Bo watched Fish pull at his whiskers. He doesn't even realize he can talk, Bo told himself.

*"Either did you,"* said a familiar voice inside his head.

*"Halfte?"* Bo thought, but the world had become silent. He was seeing Petrofi, Lynn, Fish, Aldo, and Sam Groundcart through the scrimps of thought. They were faces watching him as if he were a ghost about to slip into nothingness.

"I have something for you," Aldo said to Bo. "We all heard you speak inside our heads last night." He looked around at the others and said,

"If this hobo really has the power of the books, let him prove it." Aldo opened his brown bag as if it contained a memento from his youth, but Bo could not imagine that Aldo had ever been young. The old man had enjoyed his wrinkles for too long. They had become his shell, a strong armor not to be traded for the sweet, vulnerable face of youth.

"I've kept this hidden for a long time," Aldo said as he handed Bo a Hraustick that looked as if it had been made out of obsidian. "Make it work."

This was not an old man talking, Bo thought. It was one young brangler daring another.

*"The stick is coded to certain thought patterns,"* Halfte said. *"But with concentration, you could 'fool' it into working. It's all buried in your memory. Find it."*

Bo found it. The stick was a 'leveler' that could flatten mountains. He knew how to make it work.

"Well?" asked Aldo.

In response, Bo tossed the Hraustick away, realizing that Aldo could do more harm with his 'sight' than Hrau if he was given the chance.

"You see," Aldo said to the others. "He's a fake. I call him a liar."

Bo turned away from them and walked through the grass. *"You were right,"* Bo said to Kezia. *"We should have remained on the Node World. I should have kept my dream-language to myself instead of trying to give it to others. If men like Aldo are given 'sight,' they'll eat the world."* Once again, Bo was afraid. The bright sunlight and the pastel colors of a world creating itself anew made everything unreal. Bo felt that only his thoughts had substance.

"Wait," Lynn shouted. "We're going with you. Did you take us in only to leave us?" Fish and Petrofi followed Lynn.

And Bo's mind was suddenly filled with rainbows and thunderings. Fish and Petrofi and Lynn had found their voices.

"Tell me about things," Fish thought. His voice was the crackling of twigs.

"But I can only see the walls of the world," said Petrofi.

"You're not looking," Fish said.

"I love you," said Lynn. Her voice was the scurrying of tiny animals in the bush.

They shouted together, as if their voices and thoughts could crack the

world, brighten the sun, make windtrails in the grass. And Bo began to laugh. He felt a cosmic laughter that gave Halfte and Kezia the giggles.

Bo raised his head as if to kiss the sky. He burst through his walls and gave his memories to his friends.

As he wandered off to conquer the world with a scatgirl, a bully, and an adolescent, he saw the 'joke' of the *stad*.

And found the sight of his dreams.

—JACK DANN

Wilderness (cont. from page 58)  
air."

In her little voice the blond girl said: "I know now who you are . . ."

He was standing straight, his head thrown back. "The star-clouds, God, in Sagittarius. Stars like snowflakes in a blizzard. They look like they're frozen stiff, not moving. Flying around at hundreds of miles a second, and so far apart, so far away from us, that you can't see them move. From our place here or Mars, you see them from the exact same angle. So far

away. They were there for me to look at, the whole time out and back."

". . . the astronaut. The one who was alone for two years after the accident. Alone all the way to Mars and back."

His straightness was that of a statue, standing for a billion years and keeping on even terms of stubbornness, so far, with stars.

"Nature," he said. "Wilderness. My God, all wilderness."

—Fred Saberhagen

Eavesdropping On The Stars (cont. from page 81)

search. The first races to do so undoubtedly followed their listening phase with long transmission epochs, and so have later races to enter the search. Their perseverance will be our greatest asset in our beginning listening phase."

As the report puts it, perhaps the most important possible reward of Project Cyclops would be "the end of the cultural isolation of the human race, its entry as a participant in the community of intelligent species everywhere, and the development of the spirit of adult pride in man, rather than childish rivalry among men."

Noble aims, indeed. It leaves aside an important point, though—once we detect a signal, how do we decode it? With so little in common with aliens, other than the urge to talk to each other, how can we find a common language? Gordon Eklund and I have just finished writing an entire novel, *If The Stars Are Gods*, dealing with these kinds of problems. The issues are serious—in fact, they may be insurmountable. In my next column I'll show some possible puzzles and solutions—guesses, really—about what Project Cyclops might have to face.

—GREGORY BENFORD

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magazine generates is more than "part-time"—and it is largely unassisted. (I could use a full-time secretary, just to keep up with the necessary correspondence.) I don't mean by that that I lack assistants, however. Terry Hughes and Rich Brown have been doing the proofing—unpaid—for the past several years now. (And if you have complaints on that score, direct them to the typesetter, who appears to arbitrarily ignore corrections on occasion.) Linda Isaacs, Dave Bischoff and others have been reading submissions, paid only by the 25¢ "reading fee" we've required for the past two years. Nonetheless, editing two bimonthly magazines out of my home is a task which proliferates into all available time, and for which I am not and never have been adequately compensated. When I considered the amount of free time I could use more profitably in other pursuits, I looked forward eagerly to that day when I'd no longer be editing this magazine.

But as that day grew closer I realized, to my horror, that if I left just then I'd be leaving many projects uncompleted. There were several exciting new authors I wanted to work with. There were stories I'd encouraged and which I looked forward to seeing in print. There were various plans hanging fire. And, let's face it: after nearly eight years with the magazines I found it harder and harder to actually contemplate walking away from them. "Do you realize," I asked a friend at one point, "that soon I will have been with the magazine longer than all but one other editor—Ray Palmer?"

"A subsidized hobby," I said a little earlier. Too true. But precisely what has always made editing these magazines worthwhile to me: it was something I *wanted* to do—not something I was doing simply in order to make a living. I view a magazine—any magazine—as an entity, a temporal creature in its own right, with its own life and personality. I view my involvement in this magazine on

that level: an immersion in a creative entity which has been alive now for over fifty years. The thought that it might pass from my hands into those of someone who lacked my love for AMAZING was not pleasant—it would be like abandoning a close friend.

There were other factors influencing my decision to remain with the magazines. One of them is the fact that the publisher has on several occasions assured me that as far as he is concerned, as long as he continues to publish the magazines, they are mine to edit. Another is the fact which you may already have noticed: AMAZING is no longer being published bimonthly; it is now a quarterly—as is FANTASTIC. Which means that instead of preparing twelve issues a year, I now have only eight: a lighter workload on that level. The "part-time job" has become somewhat less time-consuming therefore. No one factor was decisive; all taken together made it obvious to me that I could not now turn my back on this magazine or its sister. I shall remain for the foreseeable future.

And what of that future?

If you read my editorial last issue you will already be aware that I do not think the future of the science fiction magazine, as a genre in publishing, is a bright one. Yet, that has been as true over the last twenty years as it is now, and it is not unreasonable to assume that in the face of this dim future efforts will continue to be made to persist, to survive. AMAZING and its four fellow sf magazines may be anachronisms, but no one is giving up on that account. Least of all, our publisher.

When the initial returns came in on our first \$1.00 issue, last year, the figures were bleak indeed. They indicated the lowest sales this magazine has ever known—sales so low that our national distributor looked askance. It was a hard blow to the publisher, who has been putting the magazine out on a break-even basis for several years, now. His response was to go ahead

with issues already in the planning stages, but to space them out over a longer period of time, meanwhile waiting for the final figures on that first \$1.00 issue and the first figures on subsequent issues. The result was a *de facto* quarterly schedule which resulted in the April FANTASTIC being redated to May, and the May AMAZING becoming the June issue.

It now appears that those first sales figures were projected lower than in fact turned out to be the case, although the final sales remained disappointingly low. It's too early to know about subsequent issues, but since with the following issue we reduced our type size to squeeze in more material, it seems likely that our circulation will recover to the level (albeit still low) which we enjoyed at the 75¢ cover price. In the meantime, the publisher has decided to retain the quarterly publishing schedule. But he has no plans for abandoning the magazines, and has expressed to me the feeling that if they are sold they must be sold to someone who will respect their traditions as we have and maintain what remains the world's first and oldest science fiction magazine.

THE LUNACON audience responded very favorably to my announcement that I would remain with the magazines, and the applause certainly buoyed my own feelings. The afternoon was not without incident, however.

Before I had begun to speak—while Barry Malzberg was speaking—a young man approached our podium and, before I was sufficiently aware of what he was doing to dodge him, he pushed a pie into my face.

Now as it happened this was neither my first acquaintance—however brief—with either the man or a pie in the face. Friday evening, shortly after I'd cut the AMAZING Birthday Cake and Isaac Asimov had led a large party of us in singing "Happy Birthday, Dear AMAZING",

the same young man materialized in front of me and pushed (not threw) a cream pie into my face.

I was mildly shocked, although I was more concerned for my glasses (which fell to the floor amidst hunks of cream pie-filling) than anything else. It was my presumption then that it was one of those "Pie Kill" jobs I'd read about in the newsweeklies, and I had a good idea, from the smirk on the face of one bystander (by no coincidence the same one who had so libelously objected to my column in SFR, mentioned earlier), who had put the fellow up to it.

But, all things considered, a pie in the face is a lot less of a bother than the nastiness involved in libelous attacks, legal hassles, etc. (had the piece been published, I would have sued its author); a pie in the face, even if it is one's own face, is intrinsically funnier. (I do not wish to encourage further pies with that remark, however; once was enough and twice was belaboring the point.)

On the occasion of the first pie-attack the attacker escaped; a confederate was holding the elevator for him. I went to my room and cleaned up, changing clothes and getting the sticky stuff out of my hair. (An hour later I was enjoying a Genesis concert uptown.)

The second attack should not have surprised me. The person whom I'd identified in my own mind as the one behind the attacks was sitting in the front row, despite having earlier expressed the wish, to the convention committee, that he not be included upon any program items which included me, since he did not care to even be in the same room with me. I should have taken his presense as a tipoff, but such is my trust in the better side of human nature—misplaced, in this case—that I did not.

So, after the attack, I asked Barry to keep speaking a bit longer, and with the help of some towels, paper napkins, and water, managed to clean myself up enough to continue the

program item undeterred.

*Karass*, the fannish news magazine, carried the following report, which I'll quote without comment:

"... On Sunday, the same or another assailant hit Ted White with a pie again (lemon meringue). Ted took it very graciously, and gamely wiped off the pie and continued with his panel. The pie-thrower was caught (he was Rex Weiner of N.Y.C.) and claimed to have done it as a prank. He also claimed not to have known about the first pie. Ted White did not press charges, however the Lunacon did, since Rex Weiner was also wearing an altered nametag and had not registered. It appeared too coincidental that the altered nametag belonged to Charles Platt, the man at the top of the 'those most likely to hit Ted White with a pie' list. Rex Weiner had altered Charles Platt's badge to Charles Blatney. Platt had reported his badge lost on Saturday and requested a new one. He also sat in the front row during Ted's speech and left immediately after the pie was thrown."

Thus missing the standing ovation which I subsequently received, no doubt in part in sympathy for the pie.

Readers who are curious about the previous activities of Charles Platt on my behalf are referred to page 125 of the November, 1971, issue of this magazine.

WHERE WAS I before that rude interruption? I was discussing the future of this magazine. Basically, the magazine will continue for the time being with few if any changes in format and I will continue to edit it. The quarterly schedule makes it impossible to publish serials, but I have a number of excitingly good novellas upcoming to take their place.

In that respect I should remark upon Jack Dann's "The Dream Lions" in this issue, which is the direct sequel to last issue's "Starhiker." Although Jack has made a few modifications in "The Dream Lions" so that it

stands alone as a story, it is, essentially, the second half of the novel, *Starhiker*, and its presentation here has been something of an undercover serialization. Not every novel lends itself to this kind of treatment, but *Starhiker* was a novel which started out as a conventional stf novel (at least on the surface) and then suddenly veered into uncharted realms about halfway through. That made a good dividing point when we decided to publish it in this fashion. (The novel was submitted when we were still publishing serials and it was our original intention to publish it as such; when that became impossible, I decided to resort to the necessary subterfuge that would allow publication in the present form.) Jack Dann strikes me as one of the more important among the newer generation of stf writers. I feel he is successfully pushing back the barriers and helping to create stf as startlingly ahead of its time as the "Thought Variant" stories published in *Astounding* in the thirties were ahead of their time. I was pleased to publish his "Junction" in *FANTASTIC*—a story which went on to be a runner-up for the Nebula Award—and I feel *Starhiker* is even more important for the field. I felt very strongly that it *had* to be published here, and I think that after you read "The Dream Lions" you'll agree with me.

Coming up? I have novellas on hand from both Robert F. Young (a much longer work from that author than you've been accustomed to seeing from him in these pages) and F. M. Busby (who has gone on to bigger things since his initial debut here several years ago). And before they're both in print I expect to have several more works which I think will generate as much excitement in the field. In fact, now that this magazine is down to four issues a year I expect every issue to be better than ever before. Stay with us; you won't regret it.

—TED WHITE

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# ...OR SO YOU SAY



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*Because our last issue—the 50th Anniversary issue—had no space for letters, we have a huge backlog of unpublished letters . . . most of which will, unfortunately, have to remain unpublished. With our new quarterly schedule it is possible for us to publish letters on the issue immediately preceding, and we do have on hand letters commenting upon our June issue. However, before getting to them, three earlier letters:*

Dear Mr. White,

I happened to read the January 1976 issue and I was shocked to see what your magazine passed off as science fiction. Although a few of the stories were mildly entertaining such as "The Dark Destroyer," "The Computer Cried Charge" and "Technicalities," most were very bad. However, the worst offender of the lot to the field of science fiction was "Manikins" by John Varley.

The author shows an unbelievable ignorance about the science of biology. All of his statements can be repudiated by common sense and a knowledge of general biology. The statement that genetics is hogwash ignores the fact that the mating of two different organisms of the same species will produce a offspring bearing the

characteristics of both parents in either the f1 or f2 generation. Genetics are used every day by farmers and ranchers to improve their stock. The author also states that these "parasites" reproduce asexually like everything else when it is known that most phyla in the Kingdoms Protista and Plantae are capable of sexual reproduction and all organisms in the Kingdom Animalia are capable of sexual reproduction, even the sponge. Varley says that doctors implant these "parasites" in a women's womb when she is pregnant, if so what about animals such as dolphins, moles, and bears which have no doctors and little contact with man.

This story shouldn't have been written let alone published, at the very least Varley should have known what he was talking about. Just in case the average person thinks that only a biologist would know these facts I am a sixteen year old high school biology student.

KIRK J. FRENCH

914 Wayside Way

Richardson, Tx. 75080

*I suggest you reread "Manikins"—you totally missed its point. Of course the biology didn't "work"—it was the product of a wholly insane person.—TW*

Dear Ted;

Feminism *per se* is not a red herring issue. The scarlet fish is name-calling. Nobody cares who personally does what to or with whom or what.

Nor do clean-glowing consciences guarantee results. Nor do I care.

Sf authors could be little black boxes, or dextrous tadpoles, the question is: what's in the stories?

Actually, this is the March AMAZING's best point. The characters all were startlingly like people, rather than the usual cardboard cutout foolishments. The men acted like people rather than hard-wired heroes; the women were autonomous persons rather than fantasy/reward dolls. What more could us feminists want?

Look at any issue of *Analog*. Plastic, plastic people (not always, but too often)! Usually in the worst written stories—as bad writers don't think much, they substitute t.v. images for introspection. Or the Great Gobs of Gor novels. Is there anyone who thinks all men and women are like that? (Slobber, slaver, throb.) And the only opposing treatment has been Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk To The End Of The World*.

C'mon, people, the issue is to write intelligently/honestly about women and men—remember that females have brains, bodies, careers, fears, heroic postures and need not be dominated/protected/power-tripped on. And if they're over 18, they're women, not girls.

Red-baiting? Party line? Ted: you wouldn't say that if a group of blacks—or Jews—or science fiction writers—stood up and said, "You've been writing about us in a stupid, incorrect stereotyped way and it's not true." Hell, you remember what being an sf author—or fan, for that matter—used to type you as. "Hyuck, hyuck, flying saucers har har." We didn't know any of us who were like that. Write from life, not television/advertising.

I think Seth McEvoy is catching the shit for the rest of us feminists, and unfairly. Seth's a friend of mine; he's no Karen DeCrow, but for Susan B Anthony's sake, how many of us are? Becoming a feminist is hard,

doubly hard for us men (take my word for it, or read Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man*)—and it isn't a one-two-three and you're there sort of thing. It's a lifetime commitment to thought and effort—and sacrificing "male privileges" in order to abandon the success-traps of superiority, relax and try to be friendly partners. So much for party line.

My question, how come it's only us guys debating the issue here? It's ver-ry suspicious. Of course, the womenfolk may have more important things to do—like fighting for equal legal rights, career oppty's & pay, writing good stories, and generally not being too concerned what (us) men say except when it imposes on them.

Finally, an sf editor who claims that themes and ideologies are not as important in writing as "quality"—but that's another issue.

DANIEL P. DERN  
314 S. Walnut St.

West Chester, Pa. 19380

*Carry your argument a step further: let's get rid of dogmatic jargon along with the other stereotypes. Feminism is simply the opposite side of the coin from male sexism—a reaction not unlike those shown by other "minority" groups when they've come out of the shadows and asserted themselves. As such it can be understood as a psychological necessity—a phase through which we must pass—but it remains only a way station on the road to humanism and the appreciation of individuals on their own merits, regardless of sex. At present feminism simply draws a new set of lines, defining those on one side as "friends" and those on the other as "enemies." Devisiveness on this level is hardly any improvement if the human race is to gain real maturity. As for science fiction, themes are undoubtedly important, but a story which says the "right" things (by whose definition?) but badly remains*

a failure, no matter how well-intentioned. "Quality" in writing includes "real" characters rather than stereotypes; it also includes a vivid and reader-involving prose style coupled with a plot which works. These remain my editorial criteria, and I am willing to publish stories of quality concerning any ideology.—TW

Dear Ted,

This is to applaud both your perspicacity and guts. AMAZING consistently showcases both new writers and new writing techniques, and that in itself requires a certain willingness to gamble, to take chances for the sake of art and knowledge. But you've gone one step further, you've printed a story that's triply revolutionary by a little-known writer, knowing that certain bluenosed readers may decide against renewing subscriptions because of it; I speak of Lisa Tuttle's brilliant story, "Stone Circle."

Gay people have not been welcome in the stf field. I remember a story by Poul Anderson about an interdimensional troubleshooter who, throughout the story, kept his nerve up by dreaming of returning home to his lover who had a sexually ambiguous name like Francis. It was obvious by the way the story was written that it was building up to a "shock ending"—and what was the Big Shock? The cat was gay! Gasp! How shocking! That was it, the whole shebang, he built a story around the idea that in another dimension homosexuality was accepted and this was supposed to horrify us, just as Lovecraft scares us with boogies from somewhere Else. Worse, in the "afterward," Poul said that he had been "accused of many things but now I'll doubtless be accused of worse" (paraphrase). The "worse" was homosexuality. Oh ghastly fate! to be thought . . . gay. Poor Poul.

It's about time there was a solid gay statement in stf form. My thanks to you, Ted, and my gratitude and my

heart to Ms. Tuttle.

JOHN SHIRLEY  
2027 57th Ave.  
Oakland, CA

Dear Mr. White:

Your editorial in the June issue was disheartening, to say the least. I never realized the extent of the situation in the science fiction magazine market. When you asked how long three of the five would survive, I take it yours were one (or two?) of the three in question. It would be unfortunate to lose AMAZING and FANTASTIC. But that is not the main thrust of this letter. I'm sorry to say that it is intended to be a criticism, although I offer you some ideas which may help.

First of all, I should give you my personal background in science fiction so that you can judge the merits of my opinions accordingly. You could say that I was brought up on *Analog* since that is the only magazine which I read from when I was in high school until now—I am a third year student in college. Before that was the usual juvenile science fiction—notably Heinlein and Nourse.

And now this year I have subscribed to AMAZING/FANTASTIC for a change of pace and I am not dissatisfied. Your magazine is a refreshing change from *Analog* when you have stories like those by George Martin. However, it is the rest of the stories which border on trash that decrease the quality of your magazine. I know that you are not able to get the top names all of the time, but isn't there anything else in the slush pile besides what you are printing? Specifically, many of your themes of future society have already been done to death (e.g. "Above This Race of Men"'s mindless society was boring five years ago—it's outdated). It seems that your stories have degenerated along with the majority of others which appear in the paperback anthologies (e.g. *Quark*).

In my opinion, many of these do not deserve to get into print. It's too bad that our society (economic) has forced editors to publish them.

But that isn't my main gripe. It seems to me that you have established your own small little group. Many of the storeis seem to be by the people who also litter your letter column with endless discussion of the most trivial matters which are of interest only inside of your group. You leave new readers cold.

I seem to recall that someone said the AMAZING is the most amateurish professional magazine in science fiction. And that seems to attract them. But it has the opposite effect on me—it turns me off. And speaking of fanzines, *The Club House* is the worst collection of junk I've ever run across. I don't mind reports of the *big* conventions, but even then Susan Wood has her own little group and 90% of her comments are of interest only to them. As for her reports on fanzines, that leads to something else. But before I say what, I would like to add that, in my opinion, they are a waste of space.

Which brings me to fanzines in general. It is my opinion that they are responsible for the decline of science fiction and it's magazines. While you ascribed the demise of science fiction to the rise in books published (you said there is no feedback among other things) I ascribe it to fanzines which are, except for a few, so narrow in their view and reach. It is analogous the bureaucracy, which in the end kills itself. (You know, "United we stand . . ."). They are not the only reason for the leaving of the "ghetto", but one of the major ones.

Science fiction in general seems to be running down in that there has been too much of an overlap between author and fan. I can't pinpoint it, but they should be kept clear and sepe-rate from each other. It almost seems like an entropy taking place.

So much for the bad news. In con-

clusions, I think that while you have upgraded the quality of AMAZING, in doing so you have narrowed its appeal to the readers of science fiction. Here, then, are some of my suggestions for improving AMAZING which I think are in your power.

First of all, get rid of *The Club House*. And perhaps *Science in SF*—although this varies in quality. As for the letter column, I think you should only publish letters which deal with the stories in AMAZING, perhaps about the works of the authors appearing in AMAZING (but not them personally), and maybe speculation on science (as went on in *Astounding* with the Dean Drive). There might be other topics pertinent to science fiction—but not stuff like Women's Rights and who saw who at what convention. Again, take the narrowization out of it so everyone can enjoy it and participate if they want to.

Other things—I like your interviews, but I wish a little more background could be given before the interview so we know exactly what is going on. Also, as for fiction, I wouldn't mind seeing more combat science fiction (e.g. "The Computer Cried Charge!") and good action stories like "The Men of Greywater Station" and "The Dark Destroyer". I think you should decrease the amount of "Earth in the future" stuff which keep on harping about all the naughty things we're doing and what will happen because of them. I think the science fiction reader is intelligent enough to realize the situation. He doesn't need the preaching to, it is the average public who does and that is not the job of science fiction. I think that science fiction today should create and explore different planets and civilizations and perhaps how man (or another civilization) would interact with them. In doing this, there are many facets to explore—social, economic, judicial, cultural and, though I'm personally turned off by it, religious.

But enough of that. Do you get at least some of my drift? As for trying to expand your readership, here are a few suggestions: 1. I would like to see more illustrations—at least two or three per story. How much would it cost for artwork compared to stories per page? Would a group of ten illustrations cost more than a ten page story? [Yes—tw] 2. This may sound corny, but I think that if you give it some thought, it might work. What about science fiction from other countries. How hard is it for you to get stories from England, France, Germany or other countries? Or the Soviet Union? But this is my idea—print them in their original language. I would think that enough readers know a second language that they might enjoy it. Or, as I said they're intelligent, how much work would it take to acquire a reading knowledge of them? You could run a translation with them, but I don't think it would help—it would only take up space. Russian might give you some trouble in its original state, but it's possible to translate their language so it would fit our type.

How could you get these? I would think that foreign science fiction authors would cooperate and send their stories or you could reprint them from foreign magazines which I doubt many American readers read. I'm not talking about a huge volume of the stuff, only one short story per issue. And have you thought that some foreign language classes might buy AMAZING to use?

Since I'm typing this off the top of my head, I would like to go back and add a few points to what I have already said. When I was talking about what science fiction should be, I left out my thoughts on the actual story. It should involved action and characters—specifically, a character's life or moral beliefs should be endangered and the outcome not predictable. I think an excellent guide is Ben Bova's "Notes to a Science Fic-

tion Writer". I'm not plugging Analog, but I am plugging the book. Every writer should read it.

Just a few loose ends to wrap up. First, I like your editorials, that much of AMAZING should remain at a personal level, since in actuality, you are AMAZING. And as for my comments, you should take them as unbiased—neither for or against you. I'm trying to be impartial, and if I step on toes it is because I don't want to see AMAZING/FANTASTIC go down when they have so much worth. If they go down, science fiction will lose.

Perhaps it is too late to stop the science fiction entropy—I think it is. We'll just have to sit it out as the field slumps, then sleeps, and finally reappears—perhaps in a completely different form.

JON C. NELSON  
1374 E. 7th  
St. Paul, MN 55106

*It would appear that you'd like to see AMAZING become a carbon-copy of Analog. I can't agree with you that fandom (or fanzines) have harmed stf; at least 90% of the best writers in our field either were or are fans, and fandom continues to contribute the majority of the new blood in the field, which is hardly surprising when you consider that we became fans originally because we loved stf and we subsequently began writing stf because we found we could and it was what we knew and loved best. I doubt you have either wide acquaintance with fanzines or much knowledge of the history of fandom—which is, to within a couple of years, as old as science fiction itself (and which found its origins in the letters column of this magazine). As for The Club House—which is absent this issue—I get the feeling you've never read it. There is hardly anything "bigger" than the annual World Science Fiction Convention, which is what the column you object to concerned itself with.—tw*

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